

THE COMMUTERS



ALBERT BIGELOW PAINE

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THE COMMUTERS



“ THEN THE SUPPLY BECAME GREAT ENOUGH FOR ALL ”

(Page 9) Frontispiece

THE COMMUTERS

*The Story of
A Little Hearth and Garden*

BY ALBERT BIGELOW PAINE

AUTHOR OF "THE VAN DWELLERS,"

"THE BREAD LINE," "THE
GREAT WHITE WAY,"

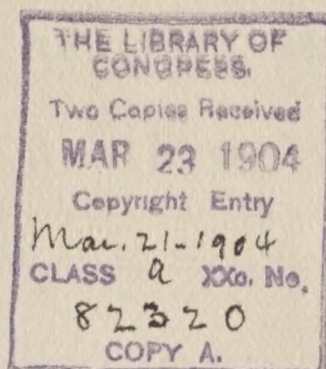
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THE COMMUTERS

I.

A Garden of Dreams.

OUR first summer in the suburbs had been preparatory.

After four years of "flat life" we were not overparticular, and had been inclined to be pleased with things as we found them. The air was balm; the beneficent quiet an anodyne for all human ills. We praised indiscriminately whatever came to hand, and were in no mood to criticize, remodel, or improve.

As for the Precious Ones, they romped and rejoiced, and found

fault with nothing but their meal-times, which they thought should come oftener, and with their bed-times, which they thought should not come at all. Watching them grow brown and hearty, the Little Woman and I rejoiced likewise, declaring that God had made the country, and that it was good.

But with the coming of winter, we began to plan. Perhaps we did not confess it, but the old habit of restlessness, and the need of change, were not wholly dead. We could not now look up a new habitation and call in the moving-man, as in the bygone van-dwelling days, nor did we wish to. We were satisfied, on the whole, and congratulated ourselves that our moving-days were over.

But we did like to experiment. We liked to change things about to see how they would look in other

rooms, and we altered our sleeping arrangements no less than three times in one month. It gave us quite the old migratory feeling to be taking the beds to pieces, squeezing through the doors with the mattresses, and knocking things against the chandeliers. Perhaps the Precious Ones did not find this altogether satisfying. They declared that to them there was nothing that quite took the place of moving-day, when all restraints had been as naught, and they had raced in and out with a wild freedom, or gone on breathless voyages of discovery through a new suite of empty rooms. To their elders, it was sufficient unto the day and season. But as the year deepened we began to meditate, and to have plans. Dear heart! it is good to be young and unsatisfied, and to dream! It is

also good that the way of fulfilment is not revealed to us.

Arriving, as we did, in June, our first little garden had been a slight affair — experimental, as it were. Yet it had prospered and so prepared us for greater things. We owned the lot next to us, and the rear end of it we marked off for the sacrifice. We agreed that the grass was poor there, and that there was too much to mow, anyway. Also that another year we might as well have things growing that would be of more value than chickweed and dandelions. Then we decided to fence the little plot, and for that purpose I removed from the top of the house a rather remarkable railing, which the architect perhaps considered ornamental. He must have done so, for he put similar adornment on a number of other houses in our

neighborhood. We did not regard it with pleasure as a part of our abode, but it was just the thing for the garden, and matched the house in general design and color scheme. I superintended this piece of reconstruction, and did most of the work. I may say here that it was accomplished with more promptness and less waste of nerve tissue than any of the improvements that came later. The little double step which I built, one half leading down into the garden and the other to the front path, was a durable and even an artistic piece of work, accomplished with but a few minor accidents and scarcely any profanity. We played with these steps, and planned how the morning-glories would grow and cluster about them when spring came. The Precious Ones enjoyed them, too, and ran in and out, from

the garden to the path and from the path back to the garden, as often as two hundred times an hour. I suspect that it was the success of these steps and the fence alteration that encouraged us later to larger undertakings—undertakings that seemed beyond my mechanical skill and education, though as I reflect upon the matter I am inclined to wonder if any one could know less than those chosen to succeed me. But I am anticipating—I am not quite through with the fall gardening.

Two men came, and, turning over the little plot, took out something like three wagon-loads of excellent cobble, replacing them with other loads of a class of merchandise more likely to encourage the growth of vegetables. We realized now why the grass had languished at that end of the lot.

They also planted some plum and peach trees for us, and certain vines. Considering the fact that I could not watch them every moment, they did these things rather well. I was only obliged to move part of the vines, which was less fatiguing than if it had been the trees, or the three loads of cobble.

On the whole, they were accommodating, those gardeners, and anxious to please. If I wished a peach-tree to bear in August, they assured me that it would do so. If, upon reflection, I decided that September was the better month for that particular variety of peaches, they were ready to adjust the season instantly, and without extra charge. I altered the date on an Early Crawford as many as three times before I got it to satisfy me. I know I have the very best of everything, too, and all "true

to name." The men told me so. They assured me that there were no other tree men who were so strictly reliable in the matter of varieties, or who could get quite the special attention they received at the nurseries. They paused now and then to cite examples of their superior service, where results that were surprising, even amazing, in the way of growth and bearing, had followed. I suppose it is mingling with nature that makes all gardeners and tree men so guileless — so full of truth in many varieties, and of the gentle desire to please.

The Little Woman had not been idle. Seed catalogues began to arrive presently — wonderful pictorial affairs with illuminated fruit and flower displays on their covers. A few we had from the season before, but a good many new ones

came by mail, and yet others from our good and thoughtful neighbors, who realized something of what we had undertaken. The Precious Ones revelled in the art work of these publications, and with each new arrival divided and disputed their claims. The Little Woman and myself found it hard to get a satisfactory look at the seductive pages, and for a time civil war seemed imminent. Then the supply became great enough for all, and, lost in their delectable contents, we constructed rare dream-gardens, oblivious to sombre skies and pelting rain.

Ah, me! what is more fascinating, when skies are gray and dead leaves fall, than a splendid catalogue wherein the fair flower of hope is perennial, and seed-time and harvest shall never fail? To picture a little plot, now harden-

ing with November frosts, growing warm and fecund with April sun and shower, ready to welcome in its bosom those tiny germs of life that are to be had in magic buff packets whereon are pictures that know no blight, and instructions so simple that even in midwinter the garden of dreams becomes a joy as real as the blossoming beds of June!

We studied the catalogues assiduously, and "hardy," "half-hardy," "rows eight to twelve inches apart," "time of planting," and much similar phraseology became a part of our daily conversation. At intervals I made diagrams of different bed arrangements, showing how we could have more space for corn and less for beans and salad, or contrariwise. Then I showed how we might have small beds of a good many things, with

some cockscombs and zinnias and marigolds between, in the good old-fashioned way which we both loved. When it was not too bleak we went out into the little enclosure itself to study still further its possibilities and give reality to our dreams. One morning I went so far as to lay out its main divisions by making some paths of coal ashes. This was the first actual step in form, and the Little Woman began immediately to prepare lists of seeds.

Being not yet Christmas, it was still full early to begin ordering. Still, there is nothing like being forehanded in matters of preparation. Besides, to have things really under way would shorten the time of waiting.

There seemed to be a good deal that we had decided to have. At times I had vague doubts as to the

matter of room. We wanted corn, beans, lettuce, radishes, parsley, rhubarb, beets, onions, spinach, cucumbers, canteloupes, and a pumpkin-vine, as a matter of course. No garden would be complete without these, and then we wanted all the old-fashioned flowers, and the old saviors, too, — such as thyme, marjoram, and basil, — and a sun-dial. Also, we had determined to try Brussels sprouts, of which we were both fond, and we fell a prey to sundry other temptations, that with foliage luxuriant and verbiage attractive beset us on every page of our alluring lists. It seemed a good deal to get into a space somewhat less than thirty-five feet square, with the few odd corners of the previous year, but we determined to economize our ground as we had heard the German gardeners

did, and leave no square inch untilled.

The Little Woman voluntarily became purchasing agent, and almost daily I mailed a stuffy little envelope containing an order and "enclosed stamps" to some producer of reliable seeds and convincing catalogues. We sent orders as far West as Iowa, where there was a firm whom the Little Woman declared she knew supplied good seeds, though I have yet to learn by what special means she acquired this knowledge. I suspect that she was influenced by their attractive "combination offers," whereby the purchaser could obtain a certain number of desirable varieties for what seemed an exceedingly reasonable amount. The word "collection" invariably attracted the Little Woman, while

“seven papers for ten cents” was positively irresistible.

Perhaps she was afraid the supply of collections would run short, or that the seed market would be cornered before spring, for when I suggested at last that possibly we were overdoing the thing, she continued to order these combinations surreptitiously, this being the only time but one I have ever known of her deceiving me — the other having been when once, long before, she had ordered from an insistent picture canvasser, as a present for me, an enlargement of her own portrait, taken with that of our elder hope — the latter in her innocent babyhood. The picture was not an artistic success, and the frame seemed unnecessarily ornate. I did not see it for three years after it was delivered, though to keep it concealed from me in the

narrow limitations of apartment life, and during our many migrations, must have exhausted a good deal of ingenuity as well as nerve force on the part of the Little Woman. The burden of guilt became too much for her at last. She broke down and confessed, selecting a moment of weakness on my part for the purpose.

She was less careful in the matter of the seeds. I suppose she knew that my own inclinations would make me lenient. Once, looking for the corkscrew, I found three different assortments of pansy seed in the knife drawer, while various other unfamiliar collections surprised me now and then by coming to light from unexpected corners and at unusual times. She knew full well that I could not resist the spell of those illuminated buff packets and the

rattle of their magic contents. I merely ventured an opinion as to the number of acres we could now plant if we had them. Then, getting fairly into the spirit of it all, I went over the catalogues once more and made up and ordered a rather general selection of my own.

II.

The House of One Desire.

HAVING now got the house well seeded down, we began to give some degree of attention to other matters. As the holidays drew near, and the luminous catalogues became less in evidence, we discovered that for some reason our home lacked that cheer and comfort so necessary to the enjoyment of gloomy fields. For one thing, the house was new, and the walls still white. This was depressing at times, even when the rooms were quite warm, but there was a greater need than that of decorated walls. On a dismal Sunday it became acute. Sometimes

we wandered from room to room, seeking a welcoming corner, and vaguely wondering what it was we craved that our satisfactory rugs and furniture did not supply.

It was better at evening, for then we could gather about the shaded lamp, but by day the dreariness palled and made the Sundays long. We realized our full need at Christmas-time — a happy Christmas, too, with a tree, a turkey, and some desirable additions to our bric-à-brac collection, lacking only that one rare nucleus, — without which Christmas in the country never will be complete, — the Open Fire!

We knew now what it was that we wanted. We had been without it so long we had forgotten, and in the whirl and jangle of flat life had not missed it. Now all at once the desire for it became so great

that it overshadowed for a time the bright catalogues, our seed packets, and our fair garden of dreams. It was useless on a sunless day to sit before a Chippendale cabinet or to toast our feet over a Turkish rug, even though we had paid more for these than the cost of a new chimney. They would not take the place of a chimney and the life-giving radiance of the open fire. These, before another winter, we would have, even at the sacrifice of a good many other things we had been considering.

It was not that we were cold — at least, not very cold. With the energetic little furnace below stairs we could make the house reasonably warm, even during a northwest gale. What we wanted was the serene comfort of seeing the fire itself, of poking at it, and making it leap up the chimney, —

when all outside was gray and night gathered along the fields. We said, and it is true, that a home without a fireside is not a home at all. We wondered what the man who built the house had been thinking of, not to have remembered this fact. He had given us a number of things we would have been willing to spare, if only the cost of them might be applied on a single open fire: the ornamental railing on the front veranda we could part with, also the carved oak mantels that were now but hollow mockeries, and seemed built mainly to hold some curiously mottled tiling which even with the aid of a screen we could not wholly forget. We said that we would have accepted a cheaper railing; that the plainest, oh, the very plainest of mantels would have sufficed, if only it had sur-

rounded that joy of joys, that radiant jewel of the household, an open fire! Sometimes, when I was sweeping snow from the walks and porches, the thought that there was no bright blaze waiting for me within made me almost morbid. I was moved to poetry on the subject:

“To cheerful warmth did we aspire
Where the tide of fortune tossed us,
Till our one desire was an open fire
No matter what it cost us.”

We went so far as to try to utilize for the time being one of the pretty imitation mantels by making it serve as a framework for an imitation grate, to be filled with imitation coal and heated by the imitation gas supplied from our metre. But, alas, even this we could not have, for when the workmen came it was discovered that

our mantels were even more hollow and more of a mockery than we had supposed. The bronze fronts covered only some thin plaster and lath so inflammable that even the imitation fire we had planned was pretty certain to result in at least one genuine conflagration, with more or less annoying results. We were not as yet ready to sacrifice our rugs and our furniture, or even the house itself, for the sake of the fire thus obtained. True, we did imagine ourselves joining hands with the Precious Ones and doing a wild midnight dance about the leaping flames, getting for once thoroughly saturated with the glow and warmth and crackle of it as the blaze sprang upward to the stars. But it would be such a brief joy — and then the morning — it would likely be cold and windy — we

would burn our clothes and get ashes in our hair.

So we sighed and went back to our catalogues, our seed packets, and our plans. In time, the latter began to be definite. We would have an outside chimney built behind one of our toy mantels and so give it purpose. We would also leave an opening on the floor above, where we had concluded to locate our library, for the reason that the Precious Ones and their friends were in the habit of storming daily the room below stairs intended for the quiet company of books. We said we would be magnanimous and give it to the children, for keeps. We would put into it some things that nothing could make worse and let them have it.

I may say here that we did convert the library into a playroom,

and with results that on the whole have been satisfactory. It is hardly a gratifying place to one of æsthetic tastes, and it requires skill even in daylight to wend your way among the assortment of little chairs and carriages and tables set for parties, attended all day long by dolls of many sizes, and in various stages of decay. At night it is a land infested with snares and dead-falls, a place to be shunned by making the circuit of the hall and kitchen, so to avoid disaster and fervid words. But happy is the heart of childhood! careless of the requirements of art and order, or of the retributions of eternity. To them the days are all feasting and junket and wassail. Dark or bright, the mock banquet goes merrily on, while the hours are all sunny hours that speed with song and laughter and comforting

scrimmage, and bring bedtime all too soon.

Brief, heedless childhood! Take the best room in the house if you want it! Turn it into a repository for damaged vehicles and a feasting-place for decadent dolls! It will not be for long. Soon, oh, soon it will be orderly again, and clean, and silent, and we shall hunger for the grimy little hands, the noisy little feet, and the babel of confused tongues! The days fly and the years pass, and you will be young such a little time! On with the banquet! Bring all the headless dolls, and those both with and without stomachs, and let them feast! Put the library anywhere! Rather would I have it on the roof, than that the dolls should climb the stairs to dine!

My old habit of digression is strong. I must do something for

it and go on with my story. We planned the chimney, as I have said. We also talked about painting, paper-hanging, and of reclaiming the attic for my study.

The Little Woman was not altogether in accord with the last-named idea. The attic seemed a bleak and draughty place, where shadows lurked and dust formed windrows on the creaky floor. She did not quite foresee its possibilities, and, to be entirely truthful, I had some misgivings of my own, though I kept up a good front and assured her that she would not know the place when I was through with it.

We almost forgot the need of the alterations in the joy of planning them. It was not until we called in some people to make figures that we came down to hard realities again, and felt the true great-

ness of our need. In the chill that followed their estimates, the bare walls became still more disheartening, the useless mantels a yet greater mockery, while even the little frozen garden with its ash-strewn paths seemed so unpromising under the drear February skies that we were driven to another revel in our neglected catalogues, and several new packages of hollyhock seed, before we were equal to a new plan — this time for an altogether different improvement; one more expensive than anything heretofore considered.

I am convinced now that it was a summer architect that planned our house. Otherwise he would not have put three north windows — two little ones, with a big one between — in the dining-room, and left out a fireplace. It was some man who spends his winters

in a climate where they run open cars all the year round, and if my petitions are heeded he will spend eternity in a still more fervent latitude. When the gales of March came down from the Adirondacks, and the heat fled to the other end of the house, our dining-room became a dismal place indeed. We kept the north shutters closed, and put an assortment of bedding between the shutters and the glass, but this, in spite of the two east windows, where a polar sun sometimes looked in, added much to the gloom of the comfortless little twelve by twelve box that had been so cheery through the days of summer-time. We said that another year we would have storm-windows, at least. And then, suddenly, I was seized with an inspiration in the way of a plan that made all before it seem poor and trifling.

I feel that the few and simple words with which I am obliged to convey the idea will give but a feeble hint of what the hope of its realization meant to us on that bitter St. Patrick's Day of its conception. Briefly, then, it was to take out those three terrible windows on the north, convert the opening into an arch leading to an eight-foot extension backed by a glorious fireplace—a radiant and boundless joy! The two narrow windows we would reset across the corners, while the large one would do for a library extension above, where, in the same new chimney, there would be still another open fire that would lend serene enchantment to our friendship with the quiet books.

The idea was breath-taking. We spoke of it in subdued voices—almost in whispers, perhaps fear-

ing that it would take fright and leave us. Then we became excited and forgot that we were cold. Also we became reckless. Let the mock mantels go! One was in the play-room. The Precious Ones had no taste, anyway! They could put their toys on it! The one in the parlor we would partially conceal with furniture and bric-à-brac. Let everything go — everything but the extended dining-room, with its stately arch, its real old-fashioned brick and mortar mantel of our own planning, its open fire of crackling logs and dancing flames! It would be the easiest thing in the world to accomplish! All we needed was money, and we would save and pinch and do without everything else we had planned — everything except the garden, of course — for this one great boon!

I made a carefully drawn plan

at once. I designed the fireplace and brick mantel after one at my club in town, and sketched the little window-seat that was to occupy one entire end of the extension. I even hung some pictures on the wall, set some plates and pitchers and things on the mantel, swung a crane with a gipsy kettle above artistically designed flames, while before the blaze, casting its shadow on the fire-lit floor, I placed a great easy chair! Once more our house was a house of dreams, — our garden abloom, — our world a dream-world! I did not sleep well that night, and, behold, when I waded home from the station next evening, the barren fields were filled as with June glory, for fortune, who sometimes neglects, but never quite deserts, her trusting children, had once more smiled, — a labor of long months, another dream,

had found at last acceptance and reward. Not only could we have our beautiful extension, but our painting and our papered walls, and we could reclaim the desert waste at the top of the house where I had planned my den. We might, of course, have applied the sum on our payments, but there was no hesitation, or if there was it was scarcely noticeable, when we remembered this alternative. We had found out at last what we wanted, and Providence had put the means of possession in our hands. We were in no mood to quarrel with Providence. Eagerly we watched the sun in its slow pendulum swing to the northward, and stepped at last into the first sunny days of springtide, with all the joy that hope and health and fond anticipation can bring to the heart of youth.

III.

The Finding of Adelia.

I MUST pause here to record the advent of two new elements — the Tiny Small One, and Adelia.

The Tiny Small One came along on a bleak day, to end happily one of those epochs of mingled hope and anxiety, which have filled the world with love and little folks since joy first blossomed in the Happy Valley and morning lay upon the Hills of Eden.

The new epoch did not begin peacefully. The Tiny Small One was not contented with things as she found them, and knew of but one way to express disapproval. I

cannot imagine where she learned this method of protest, but wherever it was, she had been carefully taught. When she was something less than a moment old she followed the lamp with eyes that perhaps but just before had closed on the glories of eternity. Then, lifting up her voice, she denounced our feeble glow in terms that could be heard by all the people who had lent us seed catalogues, and saved us the necessity of carrying the news. We thought she would conclude presently, and were rather rejoiced by the fact that at least she had good lungs. But as the hours lagged on and the end was not in sight, we said that we were more than satisfied with her vocal strength, and that we would induce her to take the rest needed by us all.

We tried several arguments.

Neighbors came and went, and left an assortment of teas and good advice. She declined the advice. She took the teas with protest. I did not blame her much, for there were a good many kinds. I don't know just how many, but I remember camomile, catnip, and anise, and English breakfast with a dash of rum.

She showed her good taste by preferring the last named. When the combination worked properly, the household lay down to brief periods of pleasant dreams, and was not particular as to the locality of its couch or the nature of its draperies. Then the dynamo would go off again and the machinery start. I constructed an arrangement over the gas-jet to warm her different kinds of beverages, but nothing seemed to get hot except my fingers and my temper, and I remember

saying some things that I have been trying ever since to forget!

It was a week of education. I have always been rather particular about my pillows and my hours of retiring. It had been my customary remark, when sleep was the subject under discussion, that unless I retired regularly I could not "knit up the ravelled sleeve of care." I could do it now. I could knit at any odd moment when the Tiny Small One chose to attend to her own knitting, and so give me a chance. I could knit standing up, simultaneously heating tea and my fingers over a Welsbach mantle. I could even slip in a few stitches while the spoon travelled from the cup of camomile to the lip of lamentation, and as for pillows, I found that the slender uprights of an iron bed not only sustained but soothed me

to sweet oblivion whenever the Tiny Small One yielded briefly her privilege and gave the uprights and oblivion a chance.

Even the Precious Ones became critical. They had been pleased with the general idea of a miniature addition to their household, — a doll that could move and feel and see and cry, — but the selection we had made did not please them. She overdid the last item. They suggested that we “take her back” and exchange her for a more satisfactory specimen.

And now came the other interesting experience — to us, I mean. We discovered one day that we must replace our household assistance, and that we had but a brief time in which to readjust matters. Fortunately Sunday was at hand, and, securing first editions and an early train, — the latter by a

scratch, — I set out for the city to pick up any desirable domestic worm that might not be already captured, and that would agree not to turn under the pink-heeled tyranny of the Tiny Small One.

On the way in I read feverishly any columns that seemed promising, and made notes of addresses, regardless of nationality and color, and varied as to locality. Then I arranged a sequence of investigation, prepared with a view to time-saving and trolley connections.

Somewhere in the neighborhood of Washington Place I made a brief incursion into Ireland. The inhabitant looked me over carefully, and with doubtful approval. Then she asked concerning the number of members in my family, their ages, the size of my abode,

its convenience to the station, and probable value.

I was convinced presently that she had missed her calling. As a census-taker, an assessor, or a land-agent she would have been a shining success. She may have been so as a domestic, but she did not impress me as such. However, I made the best showing I could. I left out the halls in giving the number of rooms, shortened the distance to the station to a dead run, forgot the bric-à-brac when it came to the assessment, and did as well as possible by the Precious Ones, including the Tiny Small One, of whom I said that she was a healthy child, and growing daily in grace and good manners. The question of wages was secondary. What I needed was help.

It was a hopeless appeal. Again she looked me over, and an-

nounced that she preferred city life. She added that she was in the habit of attaching herself to the household of "praists," and therefore accustomed to an atmosphere of quiet and seclusion, which I was obliged to admit was for me a thing of the dead past. I was plainly out of it on several counts. We parted soon and amicably, with expressions of mutual regret and regard.

I rode ten blocks and climbed four flights of very gloomy, smelly stairs into Sweden. I had been hopeful of Sweden. I had heard that Swedish girls were good girls, and even when the square-built muscular maiden came out into the hall to talk to me, closing the door firmly behind her, I was only vaguely alarmed. Through the odorous dark I spoke to her of green fields. I besought her to

take up a share of my burdens in a land where sweet spring days were near, and where all day long were birds that would carol to her of the far-off hills and fjords of her childhood. I wooed her with promises of several dollars per week and Sundays out. She listened until I was quite empty, then:

“ You lav in contry? ”

“ Well, yes, it is called the country. It is really part of the city, you know, with trains every few minutes. Nearer, in fact, than many points of Harlem. We — ”

“ I tank I not go to contry.”

“ Oh, but you would like it out there. It is beautiful in summer — like Sweden,” which remark was probably a mistake on my part. Had she been attached to Sweden she would have remained there. Indeed, it seems to me that a good

deal of this so-called affection for the fatherland is a pleasant fiction. I have yet to find the first wage-earner who has any genuine desire to return to his lakes and fells, his fjords, or his jungles, however much he may warble or babble of those beyond the sea. I wax a bit poetic myself, sometimes, and recall certain environs of childhood with affection. But I have no desire to return to them, or to locate in a place recommended as being of similar topography.

The maid of Sweden, whose square outline only was visible through the redolent dusk, repeated that she did not sigh for green fields.

“But what’s the matter with the country?” I asked.

She reflected on the matter before replying.

“I — I tank I get sack dere.”

“ Sick? Why, the country’s the place to get well in. How do you get sick? ”

This required still more reflection. She had to think up something. Something good and hard that would close the interview. I had lost hope, of course, but I was not without curiosity as to the malady that attacked this robust young person when withdrawn from the madding crowd.

“ I — I tank I have pains! ” she announced at last, and there was a note in her accents that caused me to edge a bit closer to the head of the stairs.

“ Ah, pains. And — eh, would you — would you mind telling me where you have these pains? I have some medical knowledge — I — ”

“ I tank I have pains in my lags! I tank I know I have my

pains! I tank I know what I do!
I tank I not go to contry —!”

But I was half-way down the top flight by this time, acquiring speed as I descended into the mystery of blackness below.

“ ‘Maid of Sweden, when we part,
Give me, please, a running start,’ ”

I murmured as I touched bottom and escaped into the soiled misery of the jangling street.

It was not far to Germany, and but a step across the Rhine — the hall, I mean — into France. But the German inhabitant was not pleased with my statistics, while the grisette over the way was coy, and shrugged her shoulders at mention of the country. Clearly the servant question was no small factor in the commuter's problem. That these benighted creatures

should prefer the wretched, soulless round and wrangle of their present existence to the clean bed and outlook I offered them was not easy to understand. But I was in no mood to philosophize. I made my way to West Forty-third Street for an expedition into the Congo country.

Pickaninnies with twisted bob-bets of hair infested the entrances to the kraals, and round black eyes shone and lured me along dark passages and up winding stairs. "Ring Rev. Medders' bell" was the instruction on one advertisement, and I was presently ushered into the Medders parlor, which I am obliged to confess was cleaner, more homelike, and less redolent than some of my former experiences. Then the lady I had called to see entered, and I gasped. She was of the gold-spectacled

chocolate type, and stylish, no name. I could not at once state my errand for admiring her clothes. When I did so she regarded me with compassion, but with no sign of favor. She spoke with a drawl.

"Oh, no, sah. I couldn't go to th' country, sah!"

"Ah, I see. You prefer the city life."

"Yes, sah — always wuk in town, sah, — 'ceptin' when I goes to the country to boahd, sah."

"Vacation, I suppose."

"Yes, sah, when it's wahm, sah. I goes to the seashoah then, sah."

"You wouldn't — eh — care to board with us awhile now, I suppose?"

"Oh, no, sah. Too cold, sah. Much too cold this time o' yeah, sah."

I was about to tell her that there

was one place where it was warm enough in all seasons, and that she might go there. She volunteered presently to introduce me to some friends below stairs, who perhaps would be willing to consider my needs. At least, they might know of some kindly care-ridden soul to whom our country home would prove an asylum of repose.

There was a sound of revelry as we drew near the dim doorway below. It ceased at our knock, and a moment later the door opened to such an assortment of colored society as it had been never my privilege to enter. My expedition had reached darkest Africa at a step. When she of the gold spectacles announced my mission they crowded about to listen, and to regard curiously the stranger from so far a clime. Only one of them had any definite knowl-

edge of our place on the map. She was a jolly, fat old soul toward whom my heart warmed.

"Oh, yas, sah. I knows dat place, sah; I been out once on a trolley — to a picnic."

"Don't you want to go to another picnic?" I said, "and not come back?"

This resulted in huge merriment all around, and general good feeling predominated. A voice in the back of the crowd piped up:

"How much you want to pay to go out in de country, sah?"

I named a figure which seemed to me reckless. It was received with scant enthusiasm.

"Oh, 'shaw, I couldn't go foh dat, sah! I gets dat right heah in town, sah!"

"But it's better in the country than it is here, and you couldn't spend your money out there."

I saw instantly that this was a fatal mistake. There was another burst of merriment, and she of the piping voice became the butt of their good-humored raillery.

"You go out dere, honey, an' you cain't buy nary thing lessen you taken de train," laughed a tall creature with resplendent "ear-bobs."

"What you gwine do, Julia, when you wan' take a li'l promenade?" asked a gentleman with gaily plaided tie and patent leathers.

"Julie might set on de fence an' talk to Brer Rabbit, foh comp'ny," suggested a bowed old Remus, from the corner, and I found myself enjoying it as much as they did.

Oh, children of the Afric sun!
Undismayed in adversity — light-hearted and lavish in prosperity —

extravagant in good clothes and grief! I rejoice with you in your luxury of to-day, and in your careless heed of a morrow for which other joys and other means are somehow to be provided. The sun, that greatest of all providers, has filled you with a serene faith in its unfailing dispensations, — an unwavering trust in a beneficence that lies behind!

I was loath to leave these merry souls, and they seemed sorry to have me go. Had my business been less urgent, I might have put in the afternoon with them. As it was I bade them an affectionate good-by, and they followed me out into the hall with a friendly interest that reached anywhere within the limits of Manhattan Island. The stout lady of the trolley went a step further.

“I’d go out dar wid you, sah,

ef I could leeave," she declared, regretfully. " But I have to stay an' cook foh mah fam'ly, an' cose mah fam'ly has to stay heah."

I had an impulse to say that if she would only come I would take the " fam'ly," too, but I resisted, and was presently in the cheerless street again, where night was coming down and the yellow gas beginning to flicker dimly.

I began to have the feeling of a man who, penniless and hunting for work, is turned away on every hand. Who sees people hurrying busily to and fro, but for him no place in all that bustling throng. Who dreads to go home empty-handed with the word failure on his lip. Work was my problem, as well as his — somebody to do it. Workers there were, plenty of them, everywhere, but none for me. I was not quite penniless, but

I might as well have been, so far as fulfilling my mission was concerned. Indeed, it seemed that I was likely to become so as the price of success. My dilemma was sprouting a pair of horns.

I began to doubt some of the stories I had read of people perishing for the want of work. I wished I might meet one or two who had perished to a degree that a job in the country would tempt them. It seemed to me that there was another side to this labor question. I regretted some of the things I had said on the subject, and began to shift my pity. I knew I would need it myself if I went home with the word failure on my lip.

I was in East Forty-fourth Street by this time, climbing a flight that led to what proved to be a better part of Ireland than I had encountered hitherto. I was hope-

less, but I had resolved to make one final effort, and then keep straight on to the dark, sluggish river that had already hidden so many world-weary mortals in its quiet depths.

A bright-faced matron opened the door for me, and asked me into a small but not lavish parlor, announcing that she of the advertisement would presently appear. I gave myself up to relaxation. Then the door opened, and there was a slight rustle, as of ironed skirts. A trim figure stood before me, with a hesitating, half-embarrassed smile and a gentle repose of manner that seemed a direct inheritance from some far-off ancestor of Ireland's royal line. Instinctively I rose and offered her my seat. She remained standing. When I had stated my errand — not because I expected any result,

but because I had no other excuse for being there — she said, simply, and in a voice that was liquid music, that she would go.

I did not believe it, of course. I knew that I must be dreaming. Perhaps I had already thrown myself into the river and this was one of the hallucinations of drowning. I took a long breath, coughed, pinched myself, and said it all over. She said again that she would go. That she liked children, especially tiny small ones; also the country, particularly at this season.

Then I knew it was she who was dreaming, and I tried to awaken her to a realization of what she was saying. Still she insisted that she would go — that the place would suit her — that she would come out on the morrow, prepared to stay.

I was willing then to take advantage of her weakness, and suggested that she come at once — that I would take her to the station — that I would see to getting her trunk there — that I would carry it myself, if necessary. She repeated softly and firmly her former proposition. She would come, and she would come on the morrow. I was obliged to be content with this, though I had a cankering dread that by morning she would realize what she had promised, or that somebody would steal her away from me before she could render fulfilment. I had some thought of sitting on the door-step all night to prevent this disaster.

Arriving home, I was almost afraid to confide my good fortune to the Little Woman. I know now how the man feels when he has really got a job at last, and cannot

sleep for fear there will be some hitch before he can be installed. Bright and early I looked in once more on the gentle face of our Adelia, for such was her soft "entitlement." I feared she had changed her mind. She had not done so, — neither had she altered her charm. When she failed to arrive that evening, I was in the depths of the penniless man whose job is postponed and in the balance.

Once more I called. She was full of apologies. Her trunk had miscarried. She would be out on the morrow, certainly.

I went home with a heavy heart. The Precious Ones and the Little Woman still had food. The Tiny Small One was supplied with tea, but to-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow — Adelia was trifling with us! She meant to let us

perish! She was cold and heartless beneath a soft exterior — but, lo, early on the morrow, an express wagon drove up hastily and unloaded a heavy trunk. A neat black-gowned figure tripped up to our door, the sun that had been obscured for days broke out overhead, and all the world grew fair in the arrival of our Adelia!

IV.

The Beginning of All Things.

THE day of Adelia's arrival is memorable for several reasons.

Some days before I had missed my train by falling over a bundle of ill-timed shingles. Arising in wrath and denunciation, I had found myself face to face with a humble-looking, apologetic man, sturdy of architecture and rustic in design. His mild manner and gentle sympathy dissolved my acrimony. I lingered to talk with him on the subject of attachments, one of which he was then adding to a stable.

I became deeply interested in

his honest counsel and tendency to modest estimates, — so much so that I had well-nigh missed my next train. He called the next evening to make figures on our job.

We were impressed with the quiet, easy manner of his method. Some of them had insisted on measuring everything in sight, from the height of our foundation to the thickness of our picture moulding. After which they had required at least a week to add all these figures together and multiply them by the general area of a lot of things that were somewhere else. They had been critical, too, almost disagreeable, in the matter of my carefully prepared ground-plan and elevations. They had wanted to know if they were to furnish the pitchers and things on the mantel, and the arm-chair, with a shadow on the firelit

floor. Our new man did none of these things. He admired my drawings, and he seemed to know our measurements by intuition. When I had explained to him that we were putting the attachment on the house chiefly to get the fireplaces, and that these must be successful, with proper draught, he entered thoroughly into the spirit of the idea. I led him to the garret and showed him where I desired a wide dormer-window, with broad seat, and diamond-paned hinged sash that opened to the sunrise. How all the way around the room I wanted small uprights, upon which I would myself tack the gray deadening felt that was to cover the wall and the rafters overhead. I pointed to the opening in the roof, where the iron box-cover was to be replaced by a small hinged skylight; to a spot in the

floor, where there would be a register connecting with the furnace below, and to the chimney at the end, in which I had planned a pipe-hole for a Franklin stove, with a shelf supported by two rustic posts, one on each side, to complete the mantel effect. He understood at a glance, and suggested one or two things which I had overlooked, but which appealed to me instantly as being in line with my own thought, and desirable.

I had been obliged to beat my ideas into the others, with a force that was not always pleasant. They had wanted me to have it *their* way, and they had ended by putting on a price that prohibited my having it at all. In our new man I recognized a rare soul under a humble exterior—a creature of sympathetic imagination and open heart. I also recognized the hand

of Providence in that bundle of shingles, and was strengthened in my theories concerning the larger meaning of life's most trivial incidents.

When we went below, I expected him to say that he would prepare an estimate in a few days. He did nothing of the sort. He took a leaf from his simple notebook, and on the side not containing the advertisement, wrote, with a pencil:

"I wil do all work as spesifide in yur plans, garet and dinin room for —" The figure named was fully a third less than that of any former estimate.

We could have fallen upon his neck, and we agreed hastily, lest he should change his mind. He showed no disposition to do this, but assured us that he would have the job done in a jiffy — that he

would work it in between two larger jobs, one just finished, and another still to come. I inquired jocosely if the big job just finished was the attachment on the stable. We parted with merriment and good-fellowship all around. It was not until he was gone that we spelled out his signature, and became jocose again to find that by some curious freak fortune had allotted to him the strangely inappropriate name of Braikup — W. Braikup.

It was on the morning of Adelia's arrival that he had begun operations. There were three men in the garret when she came, and two outside, digging a trench for the foundation. There were also two men in the upper rooms, preparing the walls for paper, for we had contracted our painting and decorating in the meantime. Still

others were placing scaling-ladders on the outer walls, and stirring pots of variously colored pigments. Furthermore, it proved to be the first warm, sunny day of April, — a day we could not think of wasting, — and after the hastiest of introductions the Tiny Small One was given over to the gentle Adelia, while with rake and shovel and magic buff packets, and accompanied by the Precious Ones similarly laden, the Little Woman and I descended joyously the steps that led to the Garden of Our Dreams.

It was indeed a memorable day. Never have we had so much going on at once. What Adelia's first impression of us was it would be difficult to say. I had referred to our home as being rather quiet. Now, with saws and hammers in the garret, laughter and converse

in the bedrooms, — frequently carried on through the open windows with those on the ladders without, — with the sound of pick and shovel below, and the whole mingled with the occasional protest of the Tiny Small One, who found fault with certain features of the new arrangement, there was hardly the atmosphere of stillness and peace which I may have led her to expect. But the Little Woman and I rejoiced. We had come through a long, dreary winter, brightened only by our General Happiness, and our plans. Now the glad and wakening spring was upon us, and with it the beginning of a fulfilment that would presently be complete. Ten days was the time limit set by each of our various contractors, though we agreed privately that we would be satisfied if everything could be

done in two weeks, when, with our new clean house and our verdant and radiant garden, our Happiness would become a thing to incite the envy of angels.

I turned up a section of the moist earth, and we dug, and delved, and planted according to directions, while the fresh soil grew warm and fragrant under the sun's beneficent rays and fairly intoxicated us with the fumes and vapors of spring. Oh, what is so rare as the first blessed day of April gardening! To go down into the little plot that so long has lain bleak and desolate and hardened by winter frosts — to find it mellow, warm, and ready for the germs of early planting. To dig and stir and furrow, in the comfort of the sun's life-giving elixir, which presently must waken the first tender shoot and leaflet of

bloom and salad and relish into tiny rows of gratifying beginning that shall wax soon to fair and succulent maturity!

I recall now that physically I was none too well on that glorious day. I had dined with some friends on the evening before, and was regretting certain of the festivities, and the lateness of adjournment, which had necessitated my return by the slow and circuitous trolley. Ordinarily I should not have engaged in active pursuits, feeling as I did, but on this day of days I found restorative in the balm of sunlight, and in toil the anodyne of remorse.

I brought out a rocking-chair, from which I observed and criticized the Little Woman's methods of planting, and from which, in turn, she instructed me as to the best processes of turning and stir-

ring the soil. We were not wholly confined to the instructions on the packets. She had ideas and traditions of her own, while I had preserved memories from a rural childhood when gardening had been a Saturday punishment so bitter that the memory of its details could never be entirely effaced. We discussed several things, and endeavored to combine our wisdom with that of the buff packets.

It was not always easy to do. The packets said nothing as to the light and dark of the moon, which we both remembered as being important, though we disagreed in our moon science as to whether underground things, like radishes, should be planted in the dark of the moon, and salads, etc., in the light period, or *vice versa*. We finally discovered that we did not know whether the present period

was dark or light, also that we did not know which was which. We decided that we were probably betwixt and between, and would take chances.

We also disagreed as to the depth which certain seeds should be planted, and were grieved to find that the packets did not always instruct us on this vital point. The Little Woman wanted to plant deep and well, while I held for surface sowing, with a light top dressing. When the argument became strenuous, we relieved ourselves by denouncing the Precious Ones for getting in our way. Not but what they deserved it. There was any amount of room as yet, but it seemed to give them special comfort to dig and rake and discuss their own problems in each particular spot preëmpted by their elders. When we finally could

persuade them to dig apart, they made their gardens in unusual places, and with no regard as to form, or the points of the compass. It was of small moment, however, if they would only keep out of our chosen territory, and so let us dig and plant and discuss our happiness in peace.

It would be lovely, we said, to have this little garden of our own — to go down into it in the early morning and gather things fresh and green, with the dew on them. And with how little real effort each day such a spot could be cared for and made to yield abundantly! It was too bad that every one with a bit of ground like this did not improve it, instead of letting it go to waste.

The bucolic spirit waxed strong as we agreed to these things. We united in a resolve to spend no

money for garden stuff during the season, and our prospective returns of salads and green things grew as we talked, until we even had some notion of supplying our grocer with our surplus in exchange for a few staple articles that our garden might not produce. Dear heart! It is indeed sweet to have a spot where all is green and fresh and dewy, but sweeter still the memory of days like these in the heart's unfading gardens!

We had an audience presently, for our neighbors had awakened to the fact that a general upheaval was taking place in and about our domicile. They leaned over the fence to comment on my rocking-chair method of gardening, and to offer valuable counsel and encouragement. God bless our neighbors! They have been good

to us, and they have loaned us their garden tools in time of need.

We sowed beds of lettuce, chicory, parsley, radishes, onions, and peas that first day, and some beet and spinach seed about the young currant bushes. The beet and spinach idea was mine, and for the purpose of economizing space. I said we could gather them in their youth to mingle with the dandelions, which grew plentifully without planting. We agreed that we had not thus far taken advantage of a good deal that nature had done for us in the way of dandelions and the like, and both confessed a weakness for old-fashioned greens. Most of the seeds planted on this first day were of the Little Woman's Iowa brand, in which her faith was still strong. Also I may say here that it was not unjustified. The varieties result-

ing were not always of the choicest, but they did grow, whereas certain of my own selections proved rather disappointing in this particular. However, I am anticipating.

We did not follow instructions in the matter of rows. We agreed that we could not afford fifteen inches for a row of lettuce, even though the packet said the heads "frequently measured twenty inches across." Three such heads would quite fill the space we had allotted for this particular salad. We said we would have smaller heads and more of them, and that we would cut our salad according to our conditions. We compromised at last by sowing it broadcast, with the idea of gradually thinning as it matured—this being one of the Little Woman's inspirations. In the matter of radishes we planted two kinds, — the long

and the round, — the former being the Iowa brand. We halved the recipe on these, planting six inches apart instead of twelve, for we said we didn't care for radishes more than three inches in diameter, anyway, and would probably pull most of them even before they got to be that size. In fact, we pursued this general plan throughout. We were not going regularly into market-gardening, and would be content with smaller vegetables, and more of them. Two feet for a row of peas was absurd in a garden thirty-five feet square. Two rows in two feet seemed extravagant enough, but we grudgingly yielded this much, and finally levelled and raked and patted down our beds, — planted a shingle at each, with the name of contents and date of planting, — and stood off to admire our work.

“Who have you got buried there?” called our neighbor from across the fence.

Then we saw what we had not noticed before, that our little garden beds, being pretty much of a size, and rather narrow and trim and neat, with the inscribed shingle at each one, did look a good deal like graves. We laughed, however, and said they were not graves, but beds, for our hopes to rest in, overnight. Then the Little Woman went in to comfort the Tiny Small One, who had done worthily, on the whole, while I remained to plant four tiny beds of herbs next the fence. We had sage from the year before, and, beginning there, I added thyme, marjoram, savory, and basil, in rotation, so that we might say, “Sage, it’s thyme Marjoram was savory

to Basil," and so remember without the need of headboards.

Perhaps the Little Woman was not so cheerful when I went in. The rooms up-stairs were littered with lime and ladders and pails of smelly stuff, while workmen were tramping about with an utter disregard of neatness, or family convenience and privacy. Adelia and the Tiny Small One had worn and discontented looks. The Precious Ones, as usual, were clamoring for food. The masons and painters below had been getting water from the kitchen. They had tramped mortar all about the floor, and slopped water into it wherever possible. Whatever had been made in the way of progress was as yet almost imperceptible to our unpractised eyes.

I said that of course we must expect these things, and that prob-

ably they had done a good deal more than we could see. Also that we must get along as cheerfully as we could while these people were with us, and be thankful that it was to be only two weeks instead of four, as had been the case with some neighbors, who had been victimized by irresponsible workmen.

We cheered up a bit in these reflections, though, to tell the truth, it was not easy to see where we were going to sleep, and that night, when the moon rose over our incipient garden, which we looked down upon from an upper window, the trim, narrow little beds, with the shingle planted at the head of each, did look uncommonly like graves.

V.

Pussum.

BUT there is one important member of our household whom I have overlooked far too long. I refer to T. Pussum, our benign and reliable cat.

He came to us in his early life, during the first summer of our suburban residence. He was not an ostentatious cat, but a bedrabbled and bleary-eyed shred of gray that sat guarding our milk-bottles one morning when I opened the back door. Indeed, I have seldom seen a more forlorn specimen than was our stately Pussum at this the moment of our introduction.

Perhaps he was a prodigal that

had travelled far, wasting his substance in riotous living. At least, he was very footsore, and had no substance left that seemed of any value to respectable people. A vagabond and a tramp, depending on charity and odd jobs to help him on his way, he was doubtless guarding our milk supply with the hope of some slight reward. We didn't need his protection, but from the depths of my heart and one of the bottles a modest salvage was granted. I put some milk in a pan and he drank it greedily, without thanks. I did not invite him in. We had no cat as yet, but we had one planned, and it was not of this design. I hoped that when filled he would fare onward to lay protection and tribute on other milk-bottles than ours.

I forgot him presently, and was surprised when, somewhat

later, I heard the Little Woman announce that there was a kitten clinging to the screen door and crying to come in. I went out to investigate, and found him half-way up the screen. Not being able to get through the wire, he had climbed it.

“It is unnecessary to come in,” I said. “You can thank me from where you stand, or sit, or whatever you call it. I appreciate your desire, now that the pangs of hunger are allayed, to make due acknowledgment, but time is precious, and you should be on your way. There are other milk-bottles to be saved. The future is full of them. Besides, it is pleasanter without. We are barely settled. We could not entertain you properly, even if we would. Go your way. Get off of our screen door, and hence! Rapidly!”

He refused to hence. With food he had acquired vigor, and a voice strong for his size.

“Perhaps,” I said, “he wishes more food.”

I pushed open the screen and begged him to descend. This was impossible — he had not planned for retreat. His tendency was to climb higher.

I was not eager to touch him, but there seemed no alternative. I detached him from the wire and placed him before the pan. Again he ate. Again, filled with the milk of human kindness, he climbed up to vociferate his thanks and his intention of abiding with us always.

I tried to shake him off — it was no use. I unhooked him repeatedly, and placed him in remote corners of the property. He could beat me back to the screen door, even allowing me as much

as ten yards start. We repeated this race till finally I beat him. He was fully five steps behind when I got my hand on the knob, but he was coming, with headway.

I was rather warm now, and slightly annoyed by his overweening desire to become our guest. With my hand still on the knob I awaited him grimly. I did not kick him. I would scorn to kick a cat — especially, such a cat. I simply lifted him with my foot and planted him in our experiment garden. He described an arc, and disappeared among the tomato-vines. Flinging wide the door, I rushed in, unwilling to investigate the result of my violence. A sound from behind caused me to start and turn. He was half-way up the screen and going higher.

I opened the portal gently.

“Come in, little stranger,” I said.

And thus it was the prodigal became a part of our household.

As the days passed the stranger grew strong and beautiful. Not being pure Maltese, I named him at first Maltine, but this title somehow seemed frivolous, and savored of advertising; whereas “Pussum” came trippingly from the tongue, and expressed more affectionately the deep regard and admiration which he presently awakened in us all. Whatever may have been his past, it was left behind with his bleary eyes and his emaciated tail. Both were fine and expressive within the month, and daily he grew in grace and noble self-respect. None knew him but to love him, and the occasional mouse, which I caught for him in a trap, was a slight token awarded

in appreciation of his sterling qualities and unfailing appetite.

I have never seen a cat display more eagerness for mice. For as much as half a day, sometimes, he would watch the empty trap, doubtless recalling joys already tasted, and those still to come. For me to begin setting it was the signal for violent enthusiasm on the part of our faithful mouser, and at morning he invariably rushed to the spot where the trap was known to do its most efficient work. There is even a rumor among the Precious Ones that our Pussum once captured a mouse on his own account. But the testimony in the case is confusing and contradictory. I am forced to believe the reports of this mouse's death have been "grossly exaggerated." However this may be, the advent of Pussum has been much to us all,

and if we knew his birthday we would add it to our anniversaries.

Pussum is reliable in many ways. Even from the beginning he was inclined to be sober and dignified, and did not destroy frail objects in the wild gambols of kittenhood. I have wondered sometimes what his earliest days were like — those weeks that must have passed before that memorable morning when I found him protecting our milk supply. Perhaps he really never had known childhood's happy hour, but only a brief period of bitterness which he was anxious to forget. It is true, he would allow the Precious Ones to wheel him about in their little carriages, and seemed to take comfort in this apparent frivolity, of which he is still fond. It is his only diversion. He was old and reflective, even in his

youth, and the ways of other cats are not his ways.

Most young cats, and many old ones, are common thieves — ready the moment your back is turned to leap on the dinner-table and grab something. Pussum is distinctly uncommon in these matters. He would scorn to make a flying exhibition of himself, like that, or to conceal his designs. He even may be left in the dining-room alone, with safety. It is only when we are all seated and general feasting is in progress that, with the aid of a convenient chair, he will calmly climb up and leisurely select such portions of the food as please him. If restrained at these times, he regards us with reproach, and continues his selection. If repulsed, he retires with dignity, and returns presently with renewed determination. After all, he is the same kit-

ten who once climbed the screen door, and rallied to victory from the tomato-vines. He has only improved in his manners. When he wishes to come in now he does not climb the screen. Neither does he leap through the door at the first opportunity, or push his head and one foot in, like a book agent. He sits on the step until he is invited, and he will sit there all day if necessary. But though a hero of patience and perseverance, Pussum is not distinguished as a warrior. He has faith in discretion, and is willing to rely on his speed rather than upon his skill and prowess in conflict. Not that he is a coward, at least, not cravenly so. When once faced in the right direction, I have seen him defy successfully a random dog, or the ten-pound Tom Tiger across the way. His difficulty seems to be

in getting into the attitude and direction of war. Perhaps his object in running is to get far enough ahead to enable him to turn around. He does fight, too, for he sometimes bears the earmarks of battle. I suppose they catch him now and then. On the morning after Thanksgiving he had a lump on his forehead. Still more recently he returned after a night's absence in a mixed condition of mud and water and humiliation. He lamented dismally while I had him in the tub, probably explaining how the cyclone had overtaken him before he could make harbor, and giving other valuable testimony.

One night I heard a violent altercation just outside my window, and when no longer able to restrain my curiosity I arose and looked into the moonlight. A half-

grown tree stands by our sidewalk. It was late autumn, and the leaves had disappeared. They had been replaced with something larger. I did not at first realize what were the black bunches that decorated the several limbs and forks of the little tree. Then one of the bunches moved. Then all of them howled. Then I observed that it was a tree of cats. On the tip-topmost bough there swung and balanced a feline form that evidently had been driven to a last retreat.

I descended to the kitchen and returned with coal. Leaning out, I flung a hurtling handful that resulted in a sudden and wild explosion of cats, leaving a single form still balancing on the topmost bough. Something about its outline caused me to discontinue the anthracite treatment. Then, the coast being quite clear, there

was a cautious descent, a stealthy slipping along the path below, and into the white moonlight beneath my window there stepped with solemn tread our own great gray reliable Pussum.

VI.

Paste-pot and Step-ladder.

HOWEVER little our workmen may have accomplished the first day, I am sure now that it was more than they ever accomplished on any day succeeding. For one thing, a spell of bad weather came on and interfered with those outside. The inside men did not desert us. They came and went, leaving open doors, mud, and general distress behind. They seemed to be busy enough, but we confided to each other that if they would talk less they would perhaps get along faster.

They were filling the cracks in the walls, and usually worked in

separate rooms. They kept the door open between, and through it the tide of careless converse ebbed and flowed, echoing through the hollow spaces and resounding against bare, reverberant walls, beyond which the Tiny Small One was trying to find rest. When they had been with us a week they had done nothing that I was sure of except to make weird maps of our walls and fill my hair with calcimine.

They did something the next day — they filled the house with a smell of fish. It was not of fresh fish, — I don't mind that so much, — but of a wayworn fish that has been sojourning in some secluded spot on shore during a period of warm weather. I declared that it was a nuisance, and that I would have it abated. They assured us that it was glue, and healthy.

Then I said that of course it might not be a nuisance, but that it smelt exactly like one, and I wished they would take it away. They cooked the stuff in the kitchen, on Adelia's stove. One of them, who was her countryman, had blarneyed himself into her good graces. For the latter I am still grateful, otherwise Adelia would not have been spared to us through all the trying days.

They became still more trying as they smirched and splattered their way along. It was unsafe to open a door, while a trip up-stairs was attended with uncertainty and exasperation. Step-ladders arose everywhere, and with the suddenness of mushrooms. Pots of messy and disgusting liquids were left in the capricious balance of tottering instability. We never opened anything, at last, even conversation, without previous announcement;

after which it was usually impossible. When every other room in the house was upset we huddled in the playroom, amid a disorder of broken toys and disreputable dolls, and when night came crawled through step-ladders and a wilderness of misplaced and mistreated furniture, to creep at last into tarpaulined and spattered beds, to uneasy rest.

Of course we had covered and rolled and put away as much as possible, but we had prepared for no such protracted siege as was now upon us. There were a good many things that we used in our daily life, and there were still others that ere long we were obliged to fish up from unfathomed and unrecorded depths. Other things usually came with them, and in the stress of the moment could not be replaced with care. The result

was interesting to the Precious Ones, who seemed to find joy in the general squalor of the new disorder of things.

It is not easy to be either systematic or good-natured when workmen are ordering you from one room to another, and hustling your things in a helter-skelter fashion that makes you grab for articles of vertu and needed apparel. Now and then we became excited, though fortunately at different times. There were moments when the Little Woman found it necessary to calm me, and once, when the men were handling our chattels with unusual vehemence, and she seemed a bit nervous, I turned to a soothing text and comforted her with that sweet line, "I will go softly — softly all my days." I even wrote it on a slip of paper and tacked it up, where she could

be reminded of it in moments of stress and weakness. It didn't stay long, of course. Nothing stayed where we put it now.

The situation began to tell on both of us; also upon Adelia. We had made some effort to maintain respectability, at first, and to preserve a certain dignity in her presence. Now, demoralization seemed inevitable. When I found a bunch of summer neckties in the kitchen and a charlotte russe in the parlor, I knew that we were degenerating, and that we were dragging Adelia down.

At the expiration of the ten allotted days there was not yet a strip of paper on the walls. They had made some effort at tinting the ceilings, according to contract, but had found our plaster of a nature that would not affiliate with calamine, and the contractor had

agreed to paper with plain tinted ingrain instead. I am glad now that this was done, for the paper is by far to be preferred, only I wish he hadn't made it an excuse for taking our men away and putting them on another job while, as he said, he was waiting for our "ceilings to come." We didn't see why he needed to do this. The "walls" were still within easy reach, and, bad as the situation had been, it seemed worse when the dilatory and loquacious workmen were gone, and we were left alone with our desolation, the end whereof was becoming each day more uncertainly remote.

Our paper man appeared one morning on a bicycle, carrying two rolls, one under each arm. But, alackaday! That for the side-wall, instead of being the thick silk-fibre cartridge we had

selected, — olive-hued, with a hint of gold in it, — now proved to be a flimsy, toneless stuff, without glow or soul, while the “ceilings,” waited for so long, were a disturbing and disastrous yellow. We became firm then, and it was time. We said no — we wouldn’t have it! We’d stop all proceedings first, and with bare walls and broken hearts go down to the ruin we had set out upon. We would stay unpapered through all eternity before we would put that yellow blight upon our coming days. When he realized how we felt, he took it away, sorrowfully, and lamenting our taste. Other days of woe and waiting passed. Why dwell upon them? The right paper came at last, both for ceiling and side-walls; the right burlap dado for the halls and dining-room. Piece by piece, strip by

strip, it went on. I did not hurry them now. I even abetted them, when they would all knock off for a day to go fishing, and generously take me along. On the whole, our man of decoration and his pleasant assistants were so much more faithful than our carpenters, our masons, our plasterers, our iron-workers, and all the rest of our motley and mendacious aggregation, that I remember them without bitterness, and, looking now at our restful green walls and recalling so many slighter joys that have been so much harder to obtain, I am truly grateful.

The painters being a part of this combination, my thanks extend to them likewise. When the days were sunny, they whistled and talked and tramped down our rose-bushes and such other vegetation as grew near the house. Then

they would apologize, and say, "Oh, they'll grow all right — you can't kill 'em," though we did not see why they should keep on trying to do so, or for what reason they should wish to paint a good deal of our shrubbery, when this was not in the contract, and was done at their own expense for time and material.

Yet they were good fellows, on the whole, and taught me how to catch weak-fish. I no longer cherish any ill-will because of the decorated honeysuckle, or even in memory of the pot of red paint I met one night on the cellar stairs. I should have preferred to meet it coming up, though I suppose results would have been about the same. The honeysuckle is green again, my bruises are healed, and the trousers have been exchanged with a pedler for an agate stew-

pan. Peace be with them, — the painters, I mean, — they got the house the right color, and they did not drop ladders on the Precious Ones, though many times they might have done so and been exonerated in a court of law.

VII.

W. Braikup and Barney.

I HAVE not forgotten our builder, W. Braikup. I shall never forget him. If I appear to have neglected him through the last few pages, it was only that I might give more careful attention to our decorations, and get the house thoroughly upset within before taking up the real business of disaster that presently laid its blight upon us.

Indeed, it was our builder who appeared to have forgotten *us*. Bad weather set in, as I have said, but he did not return with the sun. For days we picked our way about

a half-finished foundation, and swept lime from the back entry. Occasionally a workman would saunter in, look about, whistle a bar or two of some familiar air, and disappear. One day a pile of lumber was unloaded on the vacant lot adjoining, and our spirits rose. But the next day they came and carried most of it away again, so it was probably not intentional. Then two big locust posts, covered with some kind of vine, were one morning dragged into our lawn, and these I recognized as being the supports for my garret mantel. Again enthusiastic, I went out in the rain to shape artistically the clinging tendrils. They proved to be poison ivy, and two days later I was in a desperate state. Then it stormed again, and with the disorders that reigned within, the gloom of hope deferred gathered

over our rain-washed garden and hung wretchedly about our muddy door-steps.

When W. Braikup did appear one morning, he was a creature of remorse and good intentions. He did not appear brazenly, and try to put the blame on us, as is customary in such cases. He even did not shift the burden wholly upon the weather, as he might have done with some show of reason. He simply took off his hat deferentially and let the rain fall on his badly thatched, gambrel-shaped dome, while he craved our mercy and declared he was unfit to look us in the eye. He was through with his big job now, he said, and our work would move in a manner that would fairly take our breath away. I may say here that this was true. It took not only our breath, but our vocabulary, to keep

up with W. Braikup and his minions of mechanical machinations.

Not that I would be unduly harsh. In fact, I find that somewhere within me is a sympathetic corner, dedicated to the memory of W. Braikup. I believe that he was the victim of circumstance and unfaithful hirelings. I believe that no man of any imagination can combat for any length of time with the irresponsible, incompetent, and abandoned workmen to be had in and about New York City, without losing his health, or his moral force. W. Braikup retained his health; and when I remember the satisfactory manner with which he carried out my garret ideas, and how work really did move when he was personally in charge, I find that my corner of sympathy is much larger and a

good deal warmer than W. Braikup probably thinks, if, indeed, he ever thinks of me, now, at all.

Our hopes rose to the highest pitch. Saws and hammers were echoing once more, and lumber was being unloaded on the vacant lot. W. Braikup was personally in charge, and things moved, as he had promised. The garret was well-nigh complete in a few brief days, and I ordered the deadening felt, with which to cover the rafters and side-walls; also the Franklin stove, though, as we were verging upon warm weather, this would seem to have been an unnecessary outlay. Still, we were going to get things while we had the mood and money. We came up into the cleanly swept loft, which began to show its artistic possibilities, and, looking out the

new side window to the east, were glad to find a place apart from the paste-pot and step-ladder below stairs. We tried to be content and charitable, — to take things as they came, and be happy.

But now came another period of neglect and echoless silence. Another two weeks when workmen slouched in whistling, replied indifferently and even curtly to our questions, then, still whistling, sauntered away. Sometimes they gathered up tools which they had left in the cellar. We were getting desperate again, when two of them appeared together and set a row of studding on our new foundation, the first real progress in the way of an elevation. Our neighbors had displayed a friendly interest in our progress, and I was glad we could make a showing at last. But on the next day W.

Braikup himself appeared, and, after what seemed to me very mild reproof, administered to the miscreants of the day before, took down all the studding and reset it to accord more with the general plan and certain acknowledged principles of building. Then he set more studding and joists, and then came the mason again.

I had met this person only casually, during the construction of our foundation, but he was now to become so important a factor in my distempered days and disturbed nights, that I feel niggardly in not allowing him a chapter all to himself. I will do the best I can in the allotted space.

His name was Barney, a countryman of Adelia's, though even Adelia found little to defend in him. I am averse to epithet, but Barney was as iniquitous a lubber,

as malicious a lime-plastered liar as ever left a trail of mortar and mourning in his path. My vocabulary seems weak when I remember Barney. The murder instinct does go mouthing adjectives and fashioning phraseology; and I find, even at this late day, that the old savagery, dormant within us all, with its old cry for blood, rises powerfully within me when I recall that sullen demon of blocked chimneys and defective flues. What I most desire to hear is that Barney has fallen from one of his chimneys, — a tall chimney, with no scaffolding to impede his earthward progress. I do not want him to kill himself. He would be getting off too easy, — much too easy, — unless, indeed, he could fall head first, inside, and, getting firmly stuck in some criminally cramped portion of the flue, could

perish by lingering inches of well earned torture and remorse. On the whole, I think I should prefer that he would fall outside and break something — something important, and that could not be repaired. Perhaps the destruction of Barney's pipe would satisfy my thirst for revenge, provided it could not be mended or replaced. I do not often feel so violently about any one, but in my memory of Barney I find no corner of extenuation — no room for charity. I shall destroy Barney or his pipe, if either ever crosses my path again.

When we had got the foundation of our chimney up level with the lower joists, I brought out my plan, and showed it to him carefully. He regarded it with slight interest, and without comment. I saw presently that he did not un-

derstand my idea at all, and I called his attention to misplaced bricks. He showed no disposition to change them, and, when I became insistent, only volunteered to explain my plan to me from his point of view, which was certainly a new one, though not in accordance with my wishes. I said that I was satisfied with my original intention, and gently but firmly insisted that he move his bricks about to conform with my ideas. He did so in grim silence, and then displaced a lot more, in spite of my continuous murmur of protest and the constant display of my really beautiful plan.

I have wondered since why Barney did these things — why he could not have made some small effort to please me, so saving himself the necessity of a devilish revenge later on, and me this pub-

lic exposure of his turpitude. When he had reached the first cross layer of the fireplace, and I saw it sagging down on the steel supporting-bar, with no hope of its ever coming back to place again, I could stand it no longer, and went hastily in search of W. Braikup.

I found him crawling over the roof of a house he was building, — the new big job, I suppose, — and all the way back I denounced Barney in lurid terms. I repeated that I was building the attachment mainly to get the chimney, and that I wanted it right. I declared that Barney was a dumb-head and a botch, only fit to lay rough stone under a foreman's eye. I have taken these things back now. Barney was simply a villain, wholly unfit to lay anything except blight on the lives of innocent people.

When Braikup arrived he pulled Barney's work down, and, taking the trowel, laid the brick himself, in accordance with my ideas. As I have said, W. Braikup had imagination, and understood my plans. It was a triumph for me, and I got my fireplace to look somewhat as I had expected it would. Barney evinced little emotion — sullenly biding his time.

Above the mantel the flue was straight building until it reached the upper floor, where it made a bend around the second opening. I did not dream of absolute treachery on Barney's part, and left him to himself until he got above stairs. Here he showed an inclination to build the plain fireplace the only way that a plain fireplace can be built, and I continued to let him alone in the feeling that one may well be generous to the defeated.

I did notice, once when I looked in, that there seemed to be a good deal of mortar in the lower turn, and mentioned the fact, adding that Braikup had guaranteed the chimney to draw, and that it didn't seem to me that so many lumps of mortar inside could be a good thing for the draught. He said that it would come out when the chimney was done — that they would hammer it out with an iron ball attached to a string. I admitted that this might be possible, but it seemed to me labor which might be avoided.

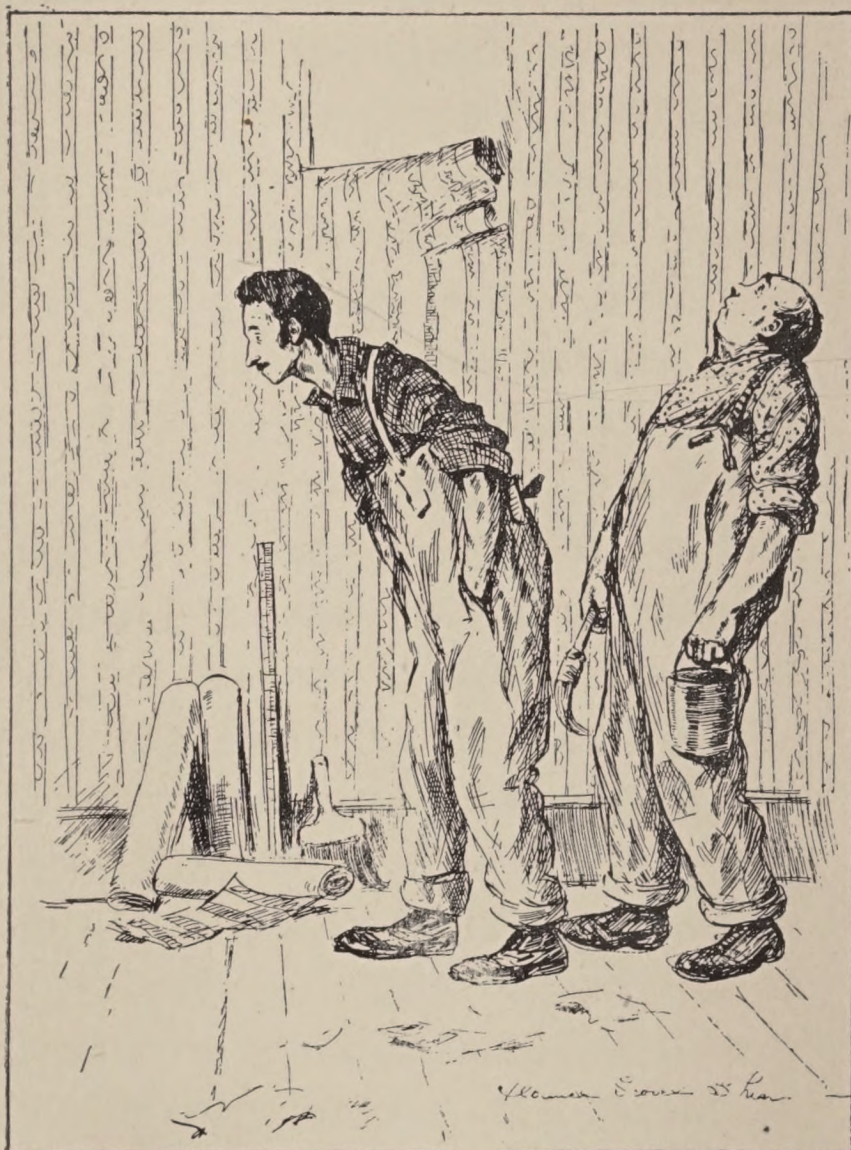
However, the chimney went on until it reached the top, reaching it several feet sooner than I could have wished, or than I believed would make it a successful conduit of smoke. I declared my conviction that a chimney ought to be able to see over the highest point

of a roof, to enable it to get a good breath of air from every direction, but as W. Braikup, in whose counsel I still had faith, assured me that it was of sufficient distance from the highest point to make this immaterial, and that the higher it was the easier it would blow over, I temporarily subsided on this point. I called his attention to certain bulgy or swollen appearances on the lower flat part, outside. He admitted that there did seem to be a certain unevenness there, but thought it wouldn't be noticed when the chimney was painted, which, on the whole, seemed more reasonable than Barney's assertion that it would all dry down even, or than the Little Woman's suggestion that perhaps these outward curvatures were to operate against the draught, and to keep the whole

lower part of the chimney from being drawn up the flue.

We had built no fire in the chimney as yet, — the absence of hearth and the presence of shavings making the experiment hazardous, though I had more than once held bunches of lighted paper to the openings, with results that awakened but feeble enthusiasm as to the draught, — notwithstanding the fact that both Braikup and Barney and even the Little Woman assured me that this was hardly a fair test, owing to the dampness of the long flue, and to some other things which I have forgotten.

What I do recall is that from this time on I gave up all thought of anything like continuous work of my own. To attend carefully to the progress of our improvements, to see that the motley and



THEY WERE USUALLY "LOOKING FOR THEIR
TOOLS"

meretricious workmen that now came and went did not altogether destroy and carry off all the rest of our house and contents, these duties were quite enough to put one able-bodied man under the sod and the dew before the end.

There were days when they worked and days when they did not. Sometimes they came for a part of a day, or even for a few minutes, to nail on a piece of siding, or to tear down something they had done the day before. At other times they dropped in merely to walk through the rest of the house, which they did at will, and with less regard for us than if we had been step-ladders or mantel ornaments. No room, no spot, no corner was free from their invasion. They were usually "looking for their tools," and, as one of the paper men missed some

of his one day, and as I discovered that my own kit in the cellar was depleted, it would seem they had found better than we knew. I had reached a point by this time where my protest in a matter so slight as the loss of a few tools was but a feeble thing. I said that there were still some which had been overlooked, and that I would contribute these also, if this would aid in getting on with the work.

The paper man, however, was mad. I had never seen a man any madder than he was, standing on a step-ladder, with a long strip of room-moulding, which he had worked hard to fit into place, then suddenly making the discovery that some miscreant had carried off the means of affixing it there. For a time it seemed that our peaceful undertaking was to end in war and general destruction.

We did not mind. We had arrived at a point where we might have flung ourselves in the mêlée, and found relief in carnage and crimson oblivion. But somehow a truce was patched up, and the night came down on the usual desolation.

Almost imperceptibly, as moss covers a stone wall, so the siding and shingles grew over our attachment. It had been the agreement not to open the arch until everything was tightly enclosed, but one sombre afternoon, on the eve of the coldest May storm I have ever seen, when the new windows were only loosely boarded and the floor incomplete above, they took out those three north windows between, and for the next four days our destitution was complete.

VIII.

Gardens of May.

MEANTIME, what of our garden. Far be it from me to overlook that which became our chief solace during this the season of our sorrow. It has had time to come up, now, and I must neglect it no longer.

The cold and continuous rains that followed our first planting were hardly what we had hoped for, but the warm suns that followed and baked the ground, also wakened to germination the tiny life-thoughts below, and before long we saw irregular flakes and slabs of crusted earth uptilting on the little graves — beds, I mean —

where the radish seeds were planted and the peas buried in rows twelve inches apart. As for the lettuce-beds, where we had sown broadcast the Iowa seed, it was all at once a collection of innumerable little circus tents. Under each of these were anywhere from ten to a dozen tiny salad beginnings, the heads of which, we had been assured, would "frequently measure twenty inches across." I calculated that if every one of those incipient salads attained a size of even ten inches, we would have enough to cover fifty-four acres of land, with an extra hundred or so of plants, for good measure. We began to recognize the error of our sowing. It is hard to cultivate the acquaintance, or to encourage the proper deportment, of young vegetables when you cannot get between the

rows with a satisfactory hoe. I was obliged to avail myself of the miniature garden tools of the Precious Ones in order to properly reduce the incrustation of earthy matter about the radishes, while my fingers were the only implements that would serve in the tillage of the broadcast salad. It was tedious labor, and required care, for some of the earth slabs were so big that the little green Samsons beneath had all they could do to hold them up, without being hammered from above with even a toy hoe. I learned presently that it was better to pulverize the slabs during the early period of the baking process, before the brown earthenware stage had been reached. I did this, in some cases, even before the seeds had begun to shift for themselves, and usually with good results. I

wish I had done so with the onions. As it was, one single fragrant filament of green found its way through, and we were between a young-onionless garden and our vow to buy no vegetables. The result was the alternate surrender of conscience and appetite.

But most of our seeds came. Our lettuce-bed was presently a mass of green. Our radishes, encouraged by the cool, continuous rains, that bring joy and firmness to the radish heart, crowded and pushed in their six-inch rows, and were on the table a month from the day of planting.

Oh, what so beautiful as the crimson hue of the first tiny radishes from your own garden! Fresh, wet, and tender, — laid daintily on a pretty blue and white plate, — the dark green leaves forming an outward fringe. A

dip of salt, and one crisp, cool bite — a morsel like that goes far toward making any summer worth while. Adelia uttered fervent exclamations when she saw them. The Little Woman rejoiced because of her faith in the Iowa seeds. Ah, me! I wish our onions, too, had been of that brand!

When the days passed and they did not appear, I replanted, and we put out a few sets which a neighbor gave us. I also replanted the herbs. Perhaps Sage had not found thyme for Marjoram to be savory to Basil. At least, Basil was shy, while Marjoram was coy, and even thyme would make no progress in that unsavory bed. They did better on the second sowing, and their old-fashioned fragrance and flavors became as an odor of sanctity in our garden, and have filled the drawers of our old dress-

ers with the breath and memory of the past. A little of them go well in soups, too, and with baked fish and fowl — I must not forget that.

We planted other things, — a patch of beans, — a small bed of okra, — some more radishes, — some hills of cucumbers, water-melons, and canteloupes, and in one corner of our plot the hill of pumpkins, without which no garden is complete. We also put out six tomato-vines, and some pepper plants, which we bought one morning of an itinerant hothouse, and which I stayed out in the rain to plant, because I remembered having heard that things put out when it rains are sure to grow. The pepper plants I set along the fence, beyond the patch of corn, which the Little Woman and I had planted one very hot day, — she dropping the kernels and I cover-

ing with the hoe, in the good old-fashioned way. It did not occur to me that the corn would presently shade the pepper plants and render them pale and unproductive. We shall set them along the other side, next year.

By this time our interest in the garden had become deep and absorbing. Indeed, we spent a good deal of our time there. It was impossible to live happily in the house, while from the garden we could still keep an eye on the progress of accidents within, and another on the persistent weed and unambitious Brussels sprout. When in town, I found that places near the ferry, where garden implements and seeds and potted plants are sold, had acquired for me a new fascination, that more than once resulted in a later train. Armloads of tools, rhubarb, horse-

radish, and castor-oil plants, — the last named being good for the three m's — moles, malaria, and mosquitoes, — were the price of these delays. The tools we needed. The plants were presently growing in such odd corners of our garden as were still unoccupied.

The question of space began to be a rather serious problem. Now and then we could still discover a tiny vacancy, though in planting some zinnias and cockscombs I tramped down two bean bushes, while in excavating for some hills of potatoes I dug up certain cucumber seeds previously planted. I wish now I had dug them all up. Cucumbers are a good thing, but no garden of such space limitations is big enough to hold two families, where one of them is of the cucumber and the other of the canteloupe faction.

As I say, we were confronted with the need of space. We dug up some of our paths, at last, and in one of them I planted marigolds — a paper of the Iowa seeds; and I pause here to say that whatever regrets I may have had concerning lost paths, I have never begrudged the one devoted to the Little Woman's marigolds.

Things grew — it was a growing year. I have never seen weeds do better anywhere than right there in our garden. I would not have believed that you could raise so many on a spot of that size. They did not confine themselves to rows of from six to eight inches apart, but were willing to put up with any odd corner that I happened to overlook for an hour or two. The middle of the ash-strewn, hard-baked granitoid path was good enough for them, and the

fact that we walked on them daily and slashed at them with anything that came handy did not seem to discourage them or to retard their progress. Even after they were cut off with the hoe they would keep right on growing, while on the other hand, a bean or two, that I accidentally cut a little, died under treatment. Nature made weeds for something, I suppose, and, whatever it was, she made them of rather better material than she used for a good many other things of more evident purpose. I abandoned the hoe at length as a method of weed culture, and attended to this part of our crop with my hands. It was hot work, but it brought root and all, and when I had tossed them into a pile to become the compost of the future, they were at least temporarily restrained. Once, when I

was obliged to go away for a few days — on business, though the Little Woman still claims I went to get out of the muss — I found on my return that the weeds all appeared to have escaped from the compost pile and got back into their old places again, full-grown and more lusty than ever.

It needed rather more than the “little real effort each day” we had counted on, to keep our garden properly ordered during this season of many suns and showers. As for the Precious Ones, their gardens had been overwhelmed, obliterated and replanted. They were nevertheless quite happy, — the Precious Ones, — for they rejoiced in the companionship and loitering labors of even the most reprehensible of our workmen. What a blessing that they kept well during that memorable season!

They raced and rioted with their many and motley companions, and, like the corn and castor-beans and tomato-vines, grew and waxed strong through sun and shower. With them, and with our six rows of golden wax beans, we found happiness when the day shone fair, even when all was lime-dust and dismay within.

IX.

A Corner in Denims.

AS room after room began to be habitable, we eagerly put them to rights for occupancy. The question of floor covering now confronted us. We felt that we did not want anything like carpets under our rugs, even had we been able to afford them. A plain wool filling would have been acceptable, but this also meant considerable outlay. Things already were costing a pretty sum, and they were likely to cost still more. Our bare floors were oiled, but they were not of the best material, and hardly satisfactory.

I had a friend who had used

denim as a basis for rugs, with pleasing effect. We decided to try denim, beginning in my attic and continuing downward, if the result proved encouraging.

Green being our prevailing tint, I said I would have it there, too, on the floor, and that it would go well with the gray deadening felt, which, by the way, we had already tacked over the rafters and side-walls.

I may say in passing that putting on deadening felt in a garret, on a hot day, — fitting and matching it about the turns and corners, — is not what is popularly known as a “picnic,” even with all the windows open, and a little woman to help with the long strips. It seemed cool enough up there when we sat down to rest, but, standing on a chair, with one hand holding up a long, fuzzy length of wobbly

stuff that insists on pulling out the carefully thumb-pressed tack and flapping down in your face just as you are getting ready to nail home, and with your mouth full of yet more tacks, and your head tipped back to the extreme limit of neck angle, the question of heat is not always one of temperature. Now and then I made observations that might have started a conflagration, had they been less futile. We became more adept with practice. I got so I could work all day with my mouth full of tacks, and could even criticize the Little Woman's method of holding, or swear when I pounded my finger, sufficiently well for her to tell the difference in these things, which had been possible in the beginning only from my general attitude, and from the vigor with which I

usually dropped the hammer after the second item.

The Little Woman helped me with the denim, too. I cut it into proper lengths, and she ran it together on the sewing-machine, which we had hauled from under tarpaulins for that purpose. The amount needed had been something less than a bolt, but our merchant had made us a special figure on the latter quantity, and we agreed that green denim was always handy to have for curtains and the like, even if we did not continue the idea on the floors below.

We acquired some education in sewing the denim. The Little Woman informed me that in future she would baste it beforehand, though I did not realize the importance of her remark at the time. The force of it came to me

when we got to stretching the stuff, trying to make it cover the floor for which it was intended. It seems that in sewing it without basting, one edge is apt to "take up" a little, and so not come out even at the ends. With an economy inherited from Puritan ancestors, I had cut close, with the result, now, that more than one strip was something like a foot shorter than the floor length to be covered, while here and there were what looked like ruffled places that must all be pulled smooth.

Denim is stretchy stuff, but to pull out those ruffles and gain one foot in thirty is no light thing, and we got down on the deadening felt, which I had put underneath as well as overhead, and pulled and clawed and tacked and denounced each other for the better part of two days. Here and there,

in the side walls, I had left openings, for storage conveniences — these to be covered later with curtains. They became now our salvation. We could get in them and pull. We established these pulling-stations at different points along the line, adding one or two others where the distance was long and weary between.

Altogether it was quite an experience. I pounded my thumb over a hundred times, and once I nailed it firmly to the floor. Now and then we found some of the tacks I had spilled during moments of previous effort. Sometimes we found them with our knees or our elbows. Even when we saw them, they were usually under the denim, and this made it necessary to take up that portion again, or to work them across a wide expanse of green by a tedious

sliding process that frequently ended in failure.

The stretching became harder as we neared the end. The last corner will not be easily forgotten by either of us. I have always heard of "hot corners" on the red field of battle. I never before quite realized what was meant, or why so many of them have passed into history. It takes experience to bring home a thing like that. The Little Woman and I made a noble fight in our hot corner on the green field of denim. She got down flat and pushed, while I got under the window-seat that came just there, and pulled and groaned and tacked and made appropriate remarks that seemed to encourage us both. When it was all over at last, we were limp and lame and punctured, but triumphant.

The Little Woman dragged me

out from under the bench, and we surveyed our work with pride. The few wrinkles and "lap-overs" in the last corner would be covered by a couch that was to go there. The rest of the floor was smooth and soft and greenly beautiful. We realized now what my garret was to be, and agreed that it was the best place in the house.

It was, indeed, pleasant, when we had got out all the old traps that we were ready to discard elsewhere and put them up there. Threadbare rugs and mended furniture were at a disadvantage among better things, but they seemed to belong up there, and my old fishing-boots and baskets and camping-pans, — an old birch broom I once picked up in Newfoundland for two cents, an old rush wine-hamper I once fished up from the bottom of the sea, — all

the old odds and ends fell into place, while some India print curtains and pillows here and there, and the red ladder leading to the skylight above, gave touches of color that now, with my Franklin stove, lend cosy comfort and cheer to winter days. I have recently got hold of a big old fish-net, which I have stretched and looped over one side of the wall and the sloping ceiling above. It is just the thing with the gray deadening felt.

People usually want to stay in my garret, once they get here. They are willing to roam no farther, even if they could. It is still and restful, and as I turn from my writing to look out over the brown wood and faded, far-lying fields, then back to the bright open fire within, and, listening, hear the soft murmur overhead of

the rain that is just beginning, I feel that too few of us have been appreciating our garrets, or putting them to the best use.

Our success with the floor covering above stairs had made us enthusiastic on the subject of denims. We resolved that in the liberal use of denims there was a vast economy, and decided to "denimize" throughout. Interviewing our merchant, I learned that he carried three solid colors — green, red, and a rather light blue. The red we thought would do for the parlor, and the blue for the bedrooms, where we were to have pretty striped paper with blue bands and small twining roses. We didn't need a bolt of each, but it was cheaper that way, and we had reached a point by this time where denim seemed the proper thing in the way of fabric for all human

needs. We resolved that remnants of any color would make beautiful covers and curtains, as well as serviceable summer raiment for the Little Woman and the Precious Ones. I said that I could imagine nothing more gratifying than the harmony in denims which would result from a green floor basis and a red couch, with pillows of all three colors, among which might be discovered the Little Woman and Precious Ones, as well as Adelia and the Tiny Small One, each and all in the various combinations pleasingly arrayed. We would originate the idea of this denim corner, and household journals throughout the land would hail us as benefactors.

I had an impulse to get an option on all the denim in the market, in order to profit still farther from the idea. Even an advance of a

cent a yard would be quite a sum on a million yards or so, but when I mentioned the matter to our merchant, with a view of obtaining his financial support, he did not become enthusiastic, and merely said that we had a corner already, so far as he was concerned. He still had a part of a bolt of green, and this we acquired next day in exchange for blue, which we found with regret did not accord with the blue in our paper, while the soft green harmonized almost anywhere. We were sorry to part with the blue—it would have looked so pretty on the Precious Ones, but we decided that there would be a good deal of the red left, anyway, and that it would have to do.

Adelia and I laid the denim in the library, and our acquaintance ripened in the process. There was

less pulling and exhaustion this time, for the Little Woman had applied her education in the matter of stitching, and put in fewer ruffles, while I had cut more liberally, and had learned to stretch toward no corner in particular, but gradually toward all the corners, as painters stretch canvas. Still, you can't sweat and tug and tack half a day with a person, and pull at the piece she's lying on, and have her haul at the piece you're lying on, without getting more or less sociable, not to say familiar.

I had wondered sometimes, when I had found time to wonder at anything these strenuous days, why it was that Adelia had come to us. I did not know but that she might be the Duchess of Dublin in disguise, and I wanted to stand well with her when she resumed her rank and title. I said to her that

it probably seemed a bit strange that I should perform so much menial labor, and so little of anything else, but that continuous brain work had been too much for me, and I was doing this for my health. Then Adelia confided to me that she, also, had come to the country for her health, and we discovered presently that we knew a good many of the same people, as always happens in companionable talk like that.

This was pleasant enough, but it had its drawbacks. I foresaw that Adelia would be going back to town one of these days, and would doubtless attach herself to some one of her former patrons. I would not mind her telling how we had laid denim together. Laying denim is distinctly a clean and honorable employment, but there had been certain things connected

with my domestic duties, during a brief period when the Little Woman and Adelia had been coincidentally ill, that I hoped she might forget.

The library was a real joy when we got it done, and it was some place to stay, — like the attic, a final retreat from the enemy that was still rampant within our gates. With the green paper on the walls, — the green denim forming a narrow border around the big Khiva rug on the floor, — the low wall cases and the old mahogany desk and chairs, it gave us the feeling that perhaps through effort and sorrow we were to reach at last an end that might be worth while.

We decided against any further use of denim in the library. After all, there might be such a thing as overdoing a good idea. We would “denimize” the bedroom and par-

lor floors as planned, and in the making of certain hangings and cushions elsewhere — all of which I may say we did, and with pleasing results.

But the couches, the Little Woman, and the Precious Ones were spared.

X.

The Trail of the Builder.

THERE came now a period of odds and ends, — small jobs that were still necessary to complete our general undertaking, and so rid us of the destroyers of our peace.

Mechanics still came and went, and with each bit completed they appeared to destroy something else — something which required still other mechanics, and yet further destruction, to restore and replace. We agreed at length that if we had any house left when they were done with us we would be lucky. Then came the feeling that they would never be done with us. It

was a curse laid upon us for our ambition — the lifelong punishment of pride. We rebelled somewhat at this thought. The punishment seemed so disproportionate to our ambition.

We dispensed with any consideration as to their feelings, or their good intentions. We decided that they had none of either. We condemned them openly when they were with us. When they were not, we gave them absent treatment.

At times we became hysterical, and laughed. It was the only thing left — every other emotion was used up. Barney splashed and stained our wainscoting with acid and cement when he washed down our brickwork and put in our Portland hearth. Instead of slaying him, as we were justified in doing, we merely laughed at the grotesqueness of what we con-

ceived to be Barney's finishing touch.

A blacksmith came from the city one day to put the ironwork on our mantel — the wrought frames, and the hood. He loosened a good deal of the brickwork, and dug deeply into Barney's Portland hearth. When I came up-stairs, the Little Woman looked at me questioningly.

"Well," she ventured.

I dropped into a chair.

"He's gone," I said.

"Good job?"

"Nope, botch — as usual."

"I thought as much."

"Why so?"

"Well, I heard you laughing."

Poor Little Woman! There had been a time when the echo of my laugh had meant life, and renewed joy. Now, it meant only some new form of disaster and despair.

Yet, somehow, matters did progress. The painters and paper men vacated room after room, and, after cleaning them with a rake, and broom, and mop, — the rooms, of course, — we began to have portions of the house to call our own. Then I got another mason, a genuine mason, this time, — Heaven creates such a one occasionally, — to repair my brickwork, and restore Barney's ruined hearth. He put a brick arch beneath the hearth, this time, to prevent the conflagration Barney had evidently foreseen. Then between us we straightened and properly reset the blacksmithing. Our mantel was complete at last. It was not a bad job, considering the number of workmen, and it really bore a good deal of resemblance to my plan.

In the room above, a door and a

window were still lacking. The window was boarded. The door opened into the apartment occupied for the present by the Little Woman and the Tiny Small One. It was no great matter during pleasant weather, but when rain came it was damp and plastery and disagreeable. The cold storm that always comes in August found both the door and our contractor still unhung. The former was put in place next day — also the final window. Then came the painters once more, — to tint the brickwork a dull red, to paint the woodwork and dining-room floor a rich deep olive to harmonize with the walls, — to depart at last with their ladders and their cans, — and, behold, we were rid of paint, paste, plaster, and the pushers of planes. It had been April when they had appeared in our midst —

it was late August when we saw them depart. Their "ten days," with husbandry and usufruct, had become even as a hundred. Wonderful indeed are the works and ways of the builder!

We awoke to a sense of stillness and desertion. Now that they were gone, we missed them. We also missed other things. As Adelia put it, we were all the time finding new things that we missed. Perhaps our carpenters will do better on their next job. They have more and better tools.

I have said that we were rid of them. I must not be taken too literally. The workmen and their ladders were gone, but the curses lingered. W. Braikup and Barney are not to be dismissed so lightly.

The former called one morning before I was dressed, and seemed to be in a desperate hurry. The

final payment on the work was not yet due, and was not to be made until our chimney had been proven a success under various conditions of wind and temperature. I still had misgivings as to its drawing powers. We had built the attachment for the sake of that chimney. If it did not draw, our whole turbulent summer was a failure. I had declared repeatedly to W. Braikup that I would not have a smoky chimney for a thousand dollars! He had assured me as frequently that he would not supply me with one for double that amount. Our figures seemed all right enough at the time. Reflecting on them now, they appear to have been too liberal.

I was surprised at W. Braikup's early call. I was still more astonished when I learned that he wished a settlement. Not that he

was aggressive, — W. Braikup was never that, — he was humble and beseeching. He had a number of things to pay on the 1st, — bills for material and the like, — the amount I owed him was sorely needed. In the matter of the chimney, I could hold back what I thought was right — he would satisfy me on the chimney if he had to take it down brick by brick, and rebuild it from the ground.

I turned cold at the thought, and asked him what amount would answer for present needs. Then he made me a startling proposition. He realized, he said, what trouble he had made us. If I would give him a cheque for the bill, less forty dollars, he would not only give me a receipt in full, but he would also insure the chimney to draw, — so great was his need, — so complete his faith in the flue as constructed.

There was an eagerness in his manner that made me sorry for him. He had the reputation of being well-meaning and honest.

"Poor fellow!" I thought, "he is pressed for means. Here is my chance to be forgiving and philanthropic — also to make forty dollars." I hastily drew the cheque, took his receipt and guaranty, and he was gone. The weather next morning being cool and damp, I decided to try the chimney under these conditions, forthwith. I would hurry down, put the crane and gipsy kettle in place, build a carefully constructed fire, and have a bright blaze going when the Little Woman and Precious Ones came in to breakfast.

How well I remember that morning! The crane hung, the kettle swung, the fire lit. The red flame leaped at the dry kindling.

The merry crackle became as music. The smoke — the smoke started bravely up the chimney — seemed to hesitate — started again — hesitated — halted — peered at me questioningly from under the hood — wavered aimlessly from side to side — writhed and twisted in its desire to escape properly — made one more final, futile effort, and poured out into the room!

In all my life I have never seen so much smoke from one small fire. Perhaps some of the wood was damp — I don't know. I know that in less than a minute there were rings and wreaths and layers and serpentine forms above and about me — that my eyes were blinded and my lungs filled. The family entered just then, to find me madly opening and closing windows in a wild effort to find

some place where my menagerie could make its exit.

It was of no use. The wind seemed to blow from all directions at once. The snakes and wreaths and things that went out of one window came in at another. Some of them went clear around the house to get in again, while the few that had really found their way up the chimney joined in the procession. Even smoke from our neighbors' chimneys came over to mingle with the excitement, and take a look at our new dining-room.

The Little Woman says I went all to pieces. That when the Precious Ones ran about crying and getting in my way between windows, I raged, and declared they didn't draw and never would draw, and that I would get even with Braikup if I had to kill him

dead, and then pay a fine of a million dollars. The Little Woman is noted for her truthfulness, but I think her memory is at fault. I may have said that the Precious Ones didn't draw, and never would, and that I would destroy Braikup; but not at so great a cost. What I do remember, is that, in the midst of all, I seized a stray bit of paper from the mantel, intending to brighten the flame, that had died down, and increased the quantity of smoke. There was some writing on the paper, and I hesitated, for I am in the habit of making valuable notes on scraps like that, and sometimes they turn up in just such places. My half-blind vision recognized my own writing, and through a wreath of smoke the words—words long before set down for the Little Woman:

"I will go softly — softly, all my days."

An hour later we learned the worst. The man who had done our tinwork came, and he had that tired look on his face. Had we settled with Braikup? was the burden of his plaint.

"I have," I said. "I paid him yesterday morning, and I'm sorry for it. Our chimney doesn't draw, and he's got to fix it, as guaranteed. I'll go after him, to-day."

"You won't find him."

"Why, what do you mean?"

"He's gone. Left the country. Collected all he could get, and skipped — owin' me, an' everybody."

I knew by the way he said it that it was true. Subconsciously, too, I had felt that something more was about to happen. That was it. Unskilled and unfaithful work-

men had triumphed. W. Braikup had succumbed at last, leaving general wreckage behind. His name was no longer inappropriate.

Other visitors followed. We learned from them certain details as to our contractor's departure. He had taken a good deal of money; also, in the haste and darkness of his departure, the wrong wife, by mistake. At least, it was supposed to have been by mistake. Having once seen her, it was not thought possible that he could have taken her by intention.

Our visitors also put attachments on our house. In two short hours these men had put more attachments on our dining-room than by any of their former methods they would have been able to put on in the same number of years. This annoyed and distressed us. We had paid once—paid with tor-

ture and tears and carefully drawn cheques. Besides, our chimney did not draw, and most of our work seemed a failure. It was unjust that we should be asked to pay again. These men had known and trusted Braikup a number of years. They had not known or trusted us. They had given us no hint of suspicion. There had been no suspicion. I said that if I had to pay again I would make good the million dollar fine proposition, as relating to the destruction of W. Braikup.

Fortunately for us, and for Braikup, this violence was avoided. The attachments fell away like shadows, in the light of the fact that we had paid innocently — no mistrust of our contractor having developed in any quarter until it was found that he had disappeared. Our

receipt was dated twenty-four hours previous to this, and we were free, but it seemed a narrow escape. In some States we should have had to pay again.

Having now forty dollars for experiments, I got my genuine mason again, and we built the chimney higher, until it topped the roof by at least a foot. It did a little better then, but it was not as yet a thing of joy. On damp mornings we built the fire small and carefully, and, sitting before it, tried to imagine that it was not really smoking, but only giving us the nice woody smell that always came from open fires. Then, when our eyes were half put out by this pleasure, we became solemn and dismal in the thought that all our plans and our labors had not brought us the thing that we cared for most.

I grew thinner daily, and my nights were haunted by dreams of smoke-filled rooms and congested flues. It was one of these dreams that led to further experiment. My mason had dropped the regulation iron ball through our flue, and knocked out a lot of mortar, all of which had helped, but not enough. His opinion was that the flue itself was not large enough for the opening below. I did not agree with him. I held that so long a flue ought to carry the draught from an opening of ten times its size in square inches, and that somewhere there was an obstruction which the iron ball did not dislodge. After a night of vivid dreams I awoke with this as a conviction, and with a remedy.

Once more I sent for my mason, and, while waiting for him, I prepared the patent obstruction-

finder, revealed to me in my dream. I gathered a round smooth cobble for weight. I padded it with excelsior for size, and covered the whole with a piece of bagging, thus making a round, heavy, yielding ball, full eight inches in diameter. To this I attached the clothes-line, and when my assistant arrived we went up the ladders together.

I am not fond of climbing ladders, or of clinging to the top of tall chimneys in a gale of wind. But my desperation gave me courage. We let down the soft heavy ball. It went down, down, and my heart with it. If it went through, the mason was right, and the flue was too small. The chimney would have to come down, brick by brick, as Braikup had suggested. Down — and still down — then, suddenly, it stopped!

Stopped still and hard! We lifted the rope and let it drop. We hammered the weight up and down. Yielding as it was, it would go no farther. Pulling the ball up and letting it down on the outside, we could see exactly where the obstruction lay. It was where the flue made the upper bend around the second-floor fireplace. The sullen Barney had not failed in his revenge. Yet I could have shed tears of joy — not because the vindictive fellow had cramped our chimney, but because the trouble *was* that, and the terrible prospect of rebuilding perhaps averted.

Hastily we descended. Then, erecting a ladder below, my mason performed a skilful surgical operation on our chimney — two, in fact, for the flue was cramped on the lower turn also. The flue at these points was a trifle over three

inches across — just large enough to let the regulation ball pass. Barney had constructed his revenge with more skill than any other portion of his work.

Three hours later the impediment had been removed and the wounds carefully closed. We didn't need a fire that day, but we had it. We piled on wet paper and damp wood to make smoke — the smoke went where it belonged, and the wind blew it where it listed.

The Precious Ones danced and fed scraps of paper to the leaping flames. Adelia came in to look and wonder. The Little Woman kissed me, and thanked God!

XI.

The Marigold Path.

BUT I wish you might have seen our August garden!

There was never such a season for things to grow. The days gave us alternate sun and shower, and our prodigal sowing came presently to riotous harvest. Deep or surface planting did not matter, nor whether the moon was in its light or dark period. Iowa seeds, Ohio seeds, or Long Island seeds from our grocers — after that first early sowing, everything went — came, I mean — popped out of the ground as soon as put into it, almost overnight, sometimes. Flowers, vegetables, and melons,

they grew and they grew, — narrowing and covering the spaces between, — branching and bushing and festooning, — until paths were lost and stepping-places forgotten.

We had wanted an old-fashioned tangled garden. We had almost overdone the thing, for, with our economy in the matter of space, and our generosity in the matter of seed, we had achieved a jungle. But it was a fair and fruitful jungle, and in it we found a compensation for many ills.

When we went down into it with a basket, we hardly knew where to begin gathering, and, likewise, I hardly know where to begin to tell of it. Perhaps I should start with the tall row of wild Western sunflowers on the lower side. The seed of these had been sent to us

from that State to which they have given their name, and they never grew taller or sturdier, or bloomed more prodigally on their native plains than they did along our garden-side. The flowers were small, like the English variety, but often there were as many as a hundred or more to the stalk. Our stalks were about fifteen feet tall, and at blooming-time they formed a wonderful wall of gold. Nothing could be more beautiful behind a garden, or require less cultivation.

Perhaps our corn is next in importance. At least, it was next in size, and occupied more space than any other crop. The forty hills which we had planted on that hot May morning yielded no less than ten dozen beautiful Country Gentlemen's ears — I mean, of course, ears of the Country Gentleman variety. That doesn't sound quite



“I ALSO SAW IT BROUGHT STEAMING TO THE TABLE”

right, either. What I want to say is that our corn was of the variety known as the Country Gentleman; also, that from our forty hills we gathered ten dozen ears; and, furthermore, that if said corn was not sweeter and more tender than any corn ever produced before, then my testimony on the witness-stand is of no value, so far as agricultural matters are concerned. I hoed that corn, and picked it, and husked it, and saw it through the kitchen. I also saw it brought steaming to the table. I know that it was our corn, and that it was the best corn ever raised. I said so at the time. Then the Little Woman said so. Then the Precious Ones said so. Then Adelia said so. Then the Tiny Small One whooped and fanned the air with her fists and tried to say so, too. We are a truthful fam-

ily. You cannot get better testimony than that. We had another row of corn, in the little upper garden of the year before. It was pop-corn, and it yielded fifty ears of the "poppiest pop-corn that papa ever popped." The Precious Ones said that.

Beans seem to come next to corn. I will speak of our beans. Yet I hesitate, and a feeling of awe that is almost sadness comes over me when I approach so vast and venerable a subject, and recall the lavish succulence that overflowed from garden to basket and from basket to table until the Precious Ones rebelled at so much luxury, and secretly in my soul I wished that I might never taste, see, or hear of beans again.

It was distinctly a bean year — such a year as Jack must have known when his famous stalk grew

up and up to a world above the sky. We did not have that variety. Ours were the Golden Wax and Green Abundance, and the magic of their growth was in their yield. They began in June and never stopped. Cold beans, hot beans, pickled beans — beans for dinner, beans for supper, beans even for breakfast. It was regarded as disloyalty, even perfidy, to refuse them, until the Precious Ones, who didn't know the difference between disloyalty and dismay, expressed a distinct disapproval of beans.

It was a signal for general revolt, and we called on the neighbors for help. At first we picked them, — the beans, of course, — the neighbors, too, for that matter, and distributed baskets here and there among those who had supplied us with tools and catalogues and good advice. Then we issued a

general order that those who would might come and help themselves. In the midst of our be(a)neficence, we even contemplated putting up a sign, such as is sometimes seen where excavations are in progress. Only that our sign, instead of offering free dirt, would have read:

FREE BEANS

I could continue indefinitely this voluminous subject, but there is much else that demands attention. I will make mention of our okra.

The taste for this vegetable must be acquired. People do not care for the pale green mucilaginous pods at first sight, but, during a long-ago residence in the Mississippi back country, where okra is a staple article of diet, — almost the only one, sometimes, — I had

achieved the okra habit to the extent of making a vow that if ever I planted a garden of my own I should have okra. I had, therefore, put in two very short rows for my own use. These I had tended with care.

When the first few delicious pods came along, the Little Woman regarded the dish doubtfully. Then she commented in a manner that would suggest the possibility of our having made better use of even that tiny bit of our precious ground. When I prevailed upon her to taste one of the tender, uninviting-looking delights, her opinion for the moment was unchanged. But the okra habit is insidious. The next time we had it she ventured another taste. The third time, she took a whole pod. Then she was lost. After that, I had to get to the table

early, and within easy reach of the okra dish, to get a fair division. Next year we are going to plant more okra, so that the Precious Ones may be encouraged to taste and grow fond of this delectable and nutritious blessing.

We were rich in salads. "Nine new things to eat raw," one of our choicest combinations, flourished. The broadcast bed of lettuce became a green rosette of inexhaustible freshness, while the escarole came generously, and, even after once cut off, kept on coming, sweeter and more tender than ever. Radishes are usually a vegetable of early spring, becoming all pith and vanity with the warm dry days of summer. During this season of showers and cool nights, they retained all the crisp genuineness of character that had won our earlier approval. Our radish-bed, into

which, through the advice of our neighbor across the fence, we dropped two seeds wherever we took out one radish, remained radiant the season through. The parsley, which always takes its time about coming, and in getting a fair start after it does come, was by August so thick and strong that it would have made a hiding-place for a rabbit, provided the rabbit was of a small breed and would keep his ears down. Then there were the tomato-vines, set out along the fence and partly lost in the sunflowers, but big enough and prolific enough in all conscience, and the poor pepper-plants, that were overshadowed and lost behind the corn. We only got two peppers from them, but they were very good peppers, and taught us a lesson for next year.

It is a wonder that more things

were not lost, for we had planted without much regard as to sizes, and with no thought of such exuberant growth. We had to crawl through some things to get to others. The corn was like a cane-brake, through which I found one day a curious tunnel-like trail, as of some sizable creature. I followed it in its mazy wanderings, and, behold, it led back to the compost-pile by the fence, where the Precious Ones had established a "house," — a wonderfully secluded habitation, shut in by walls of green, and topped by a roof of blue and gold, — the sky of summer, and the sunflowers of the West. In one corner was a little peach-tree, two small dry limbs of which made excellent "hang-up things" for their dolls' apparel and household utensils. The dwellings of men were but a

few rods distant, but in that little house on the compost-pile they might have been as many leagues, while the voices of unsuspecting ones without — giants, maybe, and ogres — came mysteriously through whispering walls and tapestries of green.

Dear heart, I thought, here, while we toil and worry over ever so small an addition to our abiding-place, Nature has provided a residence beyond the skill of human hands! No noise, no fuss, no unskilled and unfaithful workmen! Silently by day and night the harmony of perfect toil goes on, and lo, one day the corn is in tassel, the sunflowers break into blossom. Come, now, fairy-folk, birds, and Precious Ones! Your house is ready — the key is in your hands! Come, and stand not on the order of your coming! For the

sun swings to the south, and the day hastens when the walls of green must wither, and the roof of gold grow dim. Haste to the Happy House of Summer-time, while the day is fair and the birds give welcome!

Oh, house upon the compost-pile, — with wall of green and roof of gold, — with glories fair and manifold, enduring such a little while!

A habitation frail and small, where childhood's little day abides — of that deep bosom which provides, at last, a haven for us all.

I must do something for this habit of digression. I grow worse as I get older. By the time I am fifty I shall be trying to write poetry.

There were two things that we could not raise — Brussels sprouts and a sun-dial. The former only

gave happiness to certain ants and other insects, of which there were quantities that damp season. Two quarts of inferior buds, worth perhaps twenty cents, could hardly be called a successful result from something like fifty well cultured plants. We shall buy sprouts another year. They come late, anyway, when our vow as to marketing shall have expired. The sun-dial we did not plant. The first cost was rather greater than we had thought. Besides, the spot intended for it was soon lost in a maze of vines and foliage. We have it to look forward to, and, once planted, it will mark the shining hours for all time.

In the little upper garden our cantaloupes had taken possession of most of the surface area, and adjacent paths. Long runners of yellow blossom and incipient

Rocky Fords pushed out in every direction, and became a subject of daily comment and discussion. Their growth was a beneficent joy to us. Each morning we picked our way through the tangle of dewy vines, comparing sizes of those of the day before, forecasting the future of each, and so treading the melon path of peace. Our grief came when we found that their flavor partook of the adjoining cucumbers and intermingled pumpkins. It was another lesson. Our pumpkins will be planted far away next year, — our cucumbers still farther, — they will be planted by other people.

But I must not pass our pumpkin-vine with only this grudging and half-condemnatory word. It deserves more than that, if only for its aggressive enterprise. It began quietly enough in what then

seemed a remote corner. We were rather pleased when it sent one long arm across several beds of other things to renew acquaintance with its old time-honored neighbor, the corn, and we were only vaguely uneasy when another crept down the melon path and through our division fence. But when it sent out a dozen more tentacles, and began to lay violent hold on everything in reach, to lop over the hedge and start pumpkins on our neighbor's property, to climb up the morning-glory strings and look in the kitchen windows, to watch its chance for getting into the cellar, — perhaps to save us the trouble of harvest, — to beat at the back screen door for admission, and to ascend the new arbor with the evident intention of entering up-stairs, we thought it about time

to call a meeting and adopt resolutions.

But it would take something more than resolutions to restrain that green-armed octopus that so silently through the hours of day and dark had laid its mastery upon us. It was like a vicious habit, or certain aggressive combinations of capital. A lantern slide photograph of it would have been worth a good deal of money to a temperance lecturer, and perhaps even more to an anti-trust orator. It found its way into the dreams of our Elder Hope, who knows fairy stories, and became a great green dragon, with long clinging tentacles and numerous knobs of gold.

No spot was immune. Over the fence, under the fence, through the fence — pumpkins in the corn, pumpkins hanging in the hedge, a great pumpkin that grew like a

magic golden throne in the little house on the compost pile. We discussed and resolved, and then, remembering that even certain corporations may be blessings in disguise, we surrendered to the Trust of the Golden Pumpkin.

With the exception of the sunflowers, I have avoided mentioning our floral culture until the last. I have done so purposely — not because they were unimportant, but because in our garden they were really the embroideries and decorations of the feast — the desert that follows and gives flavor and luxury to the whole.

They were mostly of the old-fashioned sorts — zinnias, cockscombs, pinks, pansies, and asters. Wherever there was a bit of border, or an open place at the end of a row, we dropped them in; and they grew and flourished, and,

like the thyme and marjoram, filled our garden with old-time friendliness and welcome. Our morning-glories clung and clustered about our gateway, as we had planned, festooning both sides until we had to push our way between. By the kitchen, too, and by the dining-room they flourished, notwithstanding the tramping painters and the ruthless carpenters. Fresh and lovely — each morning a new glory of pink and white and purple — they came nodding at our windows, while their broad green leaves shut out the midday sun.

A bunch of black-eyed susans grew at one corner of the house, — having somehow strayed in from the fields to bloom and gladden us the season through, — and at another corner grew our hollyhocks, beautiful single ones — of

which we had obtained roots, in order to have blooms the first year. They stretched out a little way along the garden fence, and their tall spikes gratified us as we saw them waving welcome to the morning, or ranked in stately order against the evening sky.

But there was something that we thought more radiant even than these. It was our marigold path. Such a splendor of gold in every shade — from light lemon to deep lustrous brown — as resulted from the Little Woman's single packet of "mixed varieties" I have never seen, or even anybody who claimed *he* had seen, either. The blooming seemed late. We began to dread disappointment, and to wish we had our lost path back. Then a bud showed here and there. Then a lot of buds. Then an open flower or two. Then a few more, and

then, suddenly, there came such a burst of marigold glory as must fill those fair gardens beyond the sun.

And this remained to us. Long after the recreant Braikup and his meretricious men had become but as sombre pages of a summer's history — long after the corn was brown and withered, the sunflowers faded, and the little house by the peach-tree was open to the view of every passer: even after the frost had laid its blight on the too presumptuous pumpkin, their golden splendor lingered. From it daily we filled our vases, our jars, and our jardinières, and put by all unhappy memories in the light of the marigold path.

XII.

Pussum's Wife et Al.

BUT I have neglected our faithful Pussum. The second great epoch in his career seems worth recording.

Somehow we never connected Pussum with romance. He was so stately and reserved in his treatment of his neighbors. Even when we saw him considering with vague interest the slender black and white cat who occupied the cellar of the vacant house next door, we did not regard the matter as more than a casual acquaintanceship. Anyhow, being well into our building and gardening, we were too busy to take more than

a passing interest in Pussum's affairs.

On the whole, it seemed to be a rather hard summer for Pussum. His favorite corners were disordered, his favorite cushions tumbled and upset. Less than this has driven more than one bachelor to domesticity, and, perhaps, after all, we were to blame.

When the house was settled at last, he returned much as usual, and presently fell into disfavor, through a persistence in occupying a newly and bluely upholstered chair, which we were trying to keep handsome and free from hairs. Repeated eviction and dire threats were of no avail. Pussum slept in the chair whenever it stood upright, and protested when it was made uninhabitable with a book, or when its angle made rest a matter of discomfort and peril.

It was this latter unkindness on our part that resulted in disaster to the chair, and in deep disgrace on the part of Pussum. I suppose I tipped the chair a little too suddenly, and Pussum, being dreaming, perhaps, thought he was falling over a precipice. At all events, he clawed and clung desperately, with the result that there were two long slits in the blue fabric, that were as wounds in our hearts. When he was finally captured and banished, I said that this was the end. At sunrise he should die. It was simply a question whether I would tie our little feline brother to a tree and use him for target practice, or take him down cellar and quietly remove his head with my new saw.

On the whole, I preferred the saw, but the Precious Ones became violent at mention of either

method. They were for overlooking the whole matter, and declared that nothing should harm a hair of their "darling cat." Still I was unforgiving, and the next forenoon, which was sunny and Sunday, when I saw him blinking at me from the steps, while I filled some vases from the marigold path, I was indifferent and cool in my manner toward him.

Then presently something was rubbing against my leg and purring. I was surprised at this — it was not Pussum's way. Neither was it Pussum, for when I looked down I saw that it was the slender, and hitherto wild, black and white cat from the vacant cellar, next door.

"Well," I said, "what does this mean? What do *you* want?"

The black and white cat looked

up pleadingly, and continued to rub and purr.

"No, go away," I growled, "we do not want you. We've got one cat too many, now."

The black and white cat looked up.

"That's just what I want to talk about," she purred. "Our poor Pussum."

"Oh, *our* poor Pussum. Um — well, never mind *our* poor Pussum. He's in disgrace. He's torn my beautiful new chair with his claws."

"Yes," assented the black and white cat, thoughtfully, "I know; but do you always like to be pushed out of your favorite seat? And don't you sometimes have accidents, too?"

"What has that to do with it? Pussum is a cat. We gave him a good home — he should appre-

ciate it. He was a stray cat, and we took him in."

"I — I am a stray, too," murmured the black and white cat.

"Well, what of it? What has that to do with Pussum?"

"I know how much he must appreciate his nice home," the black and white cat purred softly. "I know he does, too, for he has told me about it, and of how good you are to him. I hope you will forgive him."

"Oh, well," I said, "I suppose we must. Go away now, and don't bother me."

The black and white cat nestled closer.

"One thing more," she said. "Do you know that I — I'm Pussum's comfort — his companion in grief and sorrow? and that I have no friends, or home?"

What was the use? After that,

the black and white cat took up residence in Pussum's cellar, and ate out of Pussum's pan. Their family came along in time to brighten the dull winter days. There were three of them, and the resemblance was quite strong on both sides.

I have never seen a prouder mother than the black and white cat. As for Pussum, his interest was one of curiosity rather than of paternal solicitude. He removed his quarters to a distant part of the cellar, perhaps so that he might enjoy a night's rest. When I brought him to the box of excelsior, and dropped him down among his family, he seemed disturbed, and the lavish endearments of the black and white cat, who put her face to his and purred and murmured and caressed him, only caused him to draw away with

mingled embarrassment and indifference.

"Aren't you ashamed, Pussum?" I said.

"Just like a man," purred the black and white cat.

We were now somewhat overwhelmed with our feline riches. The Precious Ones were delighted with the family below stairs, and it seemed a difficult problem. In time we became rather interested ourselves, and the problem became more difficult. We were justly outraged one morning, when the Little Woman came in and told me that a dog — the butcher's, probably — had killed the black and white mother cat, and that she had seen her lying stark and cold in the lower garden. Now the pretty little ones below stairs *must* be put away — there was no help for it. We spoke of how sweet they had

become, and how the Precious Ones loved them. We recalled all the many good qualities of the mother cat, and spoke of her fond attention and gentleness, denouncing the butcher and his cruel dog in unmistakable terms.

Then I went down to do my duty. On the way I passed the sideboard, where a tall bottle stood. I stopped and poured out a deep, fiery draught. I suppose other executioners do that, too. Then I went below.

It was rather dim there. I could not see, but as I approached the box I heard a strong purring, as of a large cat. "Poor, noble Pussum," I thought, "he has shown his true character by taking charge of these motherless little ones." Then suddenly I started, for with eyes grown accustomed to the dusk I was looking down, not at Pus-

sum, but at the black and white cat, tenderly nursing her babies. She seemed warm and uninjured, and not stark, by any means.

I ascended to the garden. There, sure enough, was a dead feline, — almost her duplicate, — perhaps a long lost twin brother, who had returned to die. I disposed of him decently, then, taking our own black and white cat in my arms, I ascended to the Little Woman. She was sewing quietly when I put the gentle pussy in her lap.

I thought the Little Woman would be pleased, and shed tears of joy at this happy surprise. Instead of that, she jumped, quite suddenly, altogether regardless of the fate of the fallen and frightened tabby.

“Why — what!” she began, “what on earth —”

I was obliged to explain, and we

both became hysterical, while the harmless mother cat flew out of the room and down-stairs to her darlings.

“Little Woman,” I said, at last, when I got able to say anything, “what you don’t know about cats would make an encyclopædia.”

XIII.

Casting up the Account.

WE never seemed to get quite through paying. A number of times, when we thought we had settled the last and final bit of our liabilities, a new demand would be presented — a new hydra head to be smitten off, a new wound to be seared over and forgotten. The brace for the tall new chimney was an “extra,” of course. Likewise the storm-windows, and a new patent damper for the furnace, guaranteed to save anywhere from nine to ninety-nine per cent. of the coal used, and to supply at least double the heat. The spark-screen, andirons, and

other adjuncts for the fireplace — these, too, were outside the contract, and a good deal easier to buy than to pay for, even when the buying meant a mousing about in dusty antique stores, and the paying a simple matter of drawing a cheque.

It is easy to draw cheques when the account is replete — in fact, it is rather a pleasure to do so. I am sure the Little Woman used to regard me with an admiration akin to awe as I carelessly filled in the figures and name of payee, and signed my name with a neat flourish on the line below.

I suppose she wondered why I never let her do it, and very likely considered me selfish in arrogating to myself this important and rather agreeable duty, though I did not think of this at the time.

It presently became less agree-

able. When the third figure of our balance waned into the perspective until it became a thin line that would become a vanishing-point at the least touch, the construction of a cheque became a serious matter. It was no longer lightly conceived and carelessly put together, with decorative scrolls at the end, like a spring lyric. It became a thing of forethought and reflection, — to be wrought at last with a grave dignity that savored of the epic's solemn close, — with that feeling of sadness and longing that marks the end of each and every waning balance in the banker's till.

Oh, waning bank accounts! What stories you could tell me! I could write forever repeating only those tales, and if I repeated them well and truly, the world would always listen to that echo of hope and struggle, to the sigh and

whisper of decline. Writers there are who bewail that there is nothing left to say. Nothing left! Give me a banker's ledger, and in five minutes I will show you a hundred starting-points, each written in the crimson hue of life, each leading back to a story as new, and as old, as every emotion is new and old in a life of time and change. Comedy, tragedy, farce — they all are there, on the red-ink side. And they are good stories — I know, for I have produced material for a number of them myself. Only those were too tragic. Some day I shall persuade my friend the banker — if he remains my friend — to start me on the comedies — if he can point them out.

As I was saying, our balance became a feature of consideration, even of discussion. There were a good many things we still needed

in the way of furniture and decorations, now that our habitation was to our liking. We also needed clothes. When we sat down in our rather imposing rooms, in which there were a few good old pieces of furniture, and some truly antique rugs, the fact that our apparel was also good and old did not give pleasure to the Little Woman.

She became almost disagreeable about it one day, when I was arguing for a new chair, and declared that we looked like tramps that had got in while the folks were away.

I still urged the chair. I said that clothes were a matter of display and vanity. Also that they were transient and fleeting, while the chair would be the comfort of a lifetime. Whereupon, the Little Woman stated that there were certain garments that were not used

for display, except in magazine advertisements, and that these, as well as the chair, were matters of comfort, and needed a good deal more. She insisted that we had laid out enough on extraneous luxuries for one year, and that there were a few things we might forego, in order to be decently clad.

To do the Little Woman justice, I may say that I believe her general tendency is rather toward furniture than raiment — this being the true collector spirit, and to be commended. She had smothered her better inclination, this time, and was ready to sacrifice the chair for a silk waist and something to go under it. She meant to have garments, whatever the cost. You shall see how she was punished.

We went together. Neither could quite trust the other alone in

the department-store revel that was to follow the purchase of the waist. The fascinations of a department store are too great to be resisted singly. Even working together, and in full accord, we yielded oftener than was good for our balance-sheet, or for the prospect of the new chair any time within a period when we might reasonably hope to need comforts of the flesh.

We didn't pay as we bought. There is great saving of time in getting a transfer-card, and a greater certainty of prompt delivery in having goods come C. O. D. When we got through, we had bought most of the things we could think of; also, a good many we would never have thought of without seeing them, and that we couldn't remember when we were on the train going home.

I had not counted the exact amount of our debauch, but had run the figures up loosely and liberally, and, realizing that the end was now inevitable, drew a cheque next morning for our full balance. Then I went away, leaving the cheque and the obsequies in the hands of the Little Woman. If the amount was not quite enough, she was to make it up out of her weekly purse. If it was too much, she was to keep the change.

By some strange quirk of fortune it was too much. It was several dollars too much. The Little Woman was elated until the driver regarded the cheque rather doubtfully, and decided that he couldn't give money for it. He would give the goods freely enough. The amount of them was fully ten times as much as the change coming, but they were only goods. Money was

a different matter. He had probably heard of bogus cheques. This might be one of them. He couldn't exchange good money, however little, for a bogus cheque. Perhaps he was a new driver.

The Little Woman's argument was of no avail. He was good-natured, but he was firm. He was also ingenious. He suggested that another cheque for the correct amount would set everything straight. If the missus only had another cheque, now, she could write it to fit the figures of the bill.

The Little Woman hesitated. She had never been allowed to perform this especial and sacred rite, though she had signed almost every other kind of paper, from a receipt for a load of coal to a first mortgage, with coupons. A cheque seemed of less importance

than these. Besides, a new cheque would leave a balance as the starting-point of a new account. We were as one; why not?

She told me about it when I got home. It seems she had certain misgivings by that time — probably the promptings of a subconscious memory of banking matters and a cashier's arbitrary requirements in the matter of individual signature. It was too late to do anything that night. The bank was closed long ago, and I did not think it wise to spend the night in looking up the president, or even the cashier, to explain.

Besides, such explanation as I could invent quickly did not suit me. I wanted to sleep on the matter, and take it up fresh in the morning. Then maybe I could make up something that would

keep the Little Woman in the background.

I don't think she slept a great deal. She had a growing idea that an officer would be waiting downstairs in the morning, and that she would never look on our Precious Ones or her silk waist again. I consoled her with the suggestion that, while ignorance of the law was regarded as no excuse, there were certain extenuating circumstances — that I thought the Precious Ones would hardly be grown, and that the silk waist might be in fashion again by the time she returned to gladden our hearts once more. Still, there was an uncertainty about the outcome that made the bright morning, the new waist, and our general assortment of furnishing goods as ashes to the Little Woman. She was sorry now. She wished she had let me buy the

chair. We had an early breakfast.

The banker regarded me rather doubtfully when I had finished my statement. He had known me on both sides of the ledger for some time, but this was a new phase.

"You say your — eh, house-keeper made a cheque, without a full knowledge of the seriousness attaching to the signing of names in that promiscuous way?"

"I — yes, that's about it."

I was covering the Little Woman's identity; also, a lack of knowledge not altogether unnatural to the sex, but which I felt that he, as a banker, might regard with scorn.

"Of course," he proceeded, "as one not directly related to you the matter appears somewhat more serious. Had it been really one

of your family, now — your wife, for instance, or your — ”

“ Oh, but it's just the same, you know,” I put in. “ I mean, of course, that she — that she's really one of the family — that is, of course, it's all right, I mean.”

I had not explained my plan to the Little Woman before starting. I had an undercurrent of wonder, now, what she would say if she could overhear my efforts to get her decently out of the pitfall into which her pride had tumbled us. I hoped she was enjoying her new things.

A clerk brought the cheque at that moment. It had just come in from the clearing-house, having travelled safely through several miles of circumlocution. The six inches between the banker's hands and mine would be its hardest tug.

The banker scrutinized the signature severely.

“Rather delicate hand for a — housekeeper. How long did you say she had been in your service?”

I named the largest number of years within human limits, and reviewed the proprietary interest she had always felt in our affairs, — the amount of receipts and things she was daily called upon to endorse, — and gave another and improved version of the episode with the intelligent driver, who had been willing to give any amount of goods for my cheque, but no change. I abused the driver, — there was no harm in doing that, — he wasn't there, and it wouldn't have hurt him, anyhow. I think the driver saved the situation. The banker took a hand with me, at abusing him. Then we were united against a common en-

emy, and the Little Woman was safe.

I thought she would be tearful and contrite and grateful when I arrived with the news that it was all right and that she was to remain with us. I suppose she really was grateful, and I know that she was glad, for she went and put on all her new things and was so proud and had such an air that I didn't dare for the life of me to tell her the "housekeeping" details of my interview with the banker, and have not mentioned them till this day.

XIV.

City Guests.

DURING the progress of our building we had not mingled with the social whirl. For one thing, we had no time; and then our house was in poor condition to receive guests. We did not encourage visitors from town, and those who did come were glad enough to plead important duties or engagements, and take the first train that would carry them far from our environment of falling bricks and flying shingles.

But with the departure of W. Braikup and the other minions of Belial, and with the gradual restoration of order, we began to re-

member those who had brightened our old van-dwelling days. We wished to knot up the loosened ties of friendship, and to show them what we had been doing. We didn't feel exactly proud, I think, but we did want them to see that through a summer's toil and tribulation we had reached at last something besides disordered rooms and undesirable smells, even though the latter were usually considered wholesome. We were not entirely settled, but would be, soon. We held a consultation, and invited friends for the following Sunday.

During the next two or three days we set things to right here and there, leaving a good deal for Saturday afternoon and Sunday morning, that the house might look fresh and orderly at the

moment of arrival. I suppose we left more than we intended to.

When we had finished a scanty and hastily prepared Sabbath breakfast, and began considering the things still to be done before train time, we realized that we would better be getting the machinery in motion. I said I would put the finishing touches on the rooms while the Little Woman dressed the ducks and the Precious Ones, with the general assistance of Adelia, who was of a willing and pleasant disposition, but deliberate of movement and not over-resourceful. We agreed that we wouldn't overdo matters. We wouldn't make too much of a spread on the dinner, or the appearance of the house. We said we didn't like to look fixed up for people, but to have things appear just natural and homelike, as they were

all the time. Then I took a walk through the rooms with a view of locating a place of beginning.

It was not altogether easy to do. There seemed to be a good deal required to make our surroundings appear "just as they were all the time." Most everything needed dusting, and a good many things were not in the best places. I decided that I would begin up-stairs, and work down. I would take one end of the house or the other, and work along through the rooms and back through the hall, and so to the lower floor. Then I remembered that my garret was still higher up, and of special importance. I went up there.

It wasn't very bad, but there were several things to do, nevertheless. The fish-net which I was going to drape about the ceiling was still in a heap on the floor, and



"SHE WAS HANDLING A PAIR OF SIX-POUND DUCKS AS
IF SHE WERE IN A GYMNASIUM"

there remained some prints and posters to be tacked up, then a general straightening and final wiping, such as was needed below stairs. I went down for the carpet-sweeper, a broom, a dust-cloth and pan, some screw-eyes, a hammer, nails, tacks, and some advice from the Little Woman.

I found her already in action when I reached the kitchen. She was handling a pair of six-pound ducks as if she were in a gymnasium, directing Adelia in the matter of pots and pans, and heaping blood-curdling promises upon the Precious Ones, who were continuously in front of her with persistent inquiries as to when the train would arrive, what we were going to have for dessert, and when they were to be arrayed in their best clothing.

She paused long enough to ask

me if I was through, as she needed me to whip some cream for the charlotte russe. I answered very gently that I hadn't begun yet, and had come down to get her to help me find some things that I wanted. She stepped on Pussum's tail just then, and the two of us escaped frantically in different directions. When I got back to the garret I was willing to begin with such things as I had.

It is not easy to drape a large fish-net over a garret ceiling, and it takes time. When I stopped to look at my watch I grew cold. Then struggling with mesh and tangle I would grow hot again, and the stuff would drop down in my face, and catch in the claws of the hammer.

I got into a kind of fever at last, and when the thing was up and I was down to the real business of

straightening and pulling and wiping, I found myself working with a rapidity that verged upon delirium as the moments flew. I suppose there were things that I overlooked, and other things that I dusted twice over. It was not material. When I had finished you probably could not have told which was which. Then I suddenly remembered two curtain-poles still to be put in place, with the curtains properly draped. Before I was entirely done with these I recalled that a small bric-à-brac shelf was to be tacked over one of the upper hall doors. It took two trips to the cellar to get ready to do this. On the way up I overtook the Little Woman, who had finally got things well along in the kitchen and was steering the Precious Ones toward the bathroom. She seemed rather sombre in her

manner, and I paused to cheer her.

“Don’t overdo matters,” I said, pleasantly. “We don’t want to look fixed up for people. We want things to seem just as they are all the time.”

I suppose she thought I meant this for irony, for she announced rather grimly that the matter was getting to be pretty nearly no joke so far as she was concerned, which remark somehow touched the safety-valve, and we both laughed hysterically, as was our wont. I was presently tacking away at the shelf, to the accompaniment of lamentation and protest, these being the natural manifestations of childhood when the functions of toilet are in progress.

The shelf did not fit very well. I became a bit annoyed before I finally got it fastened and a mug

and a plate in place on it. I rested the lower edge of the plate on the end of a tape-measure, letting the other end hang down. I had been obliged to look for the tape several times, and I wanted it to be in plain view when next it was needed. It hung directly in the doorway now, where I couldn't help seeing it. Then I became occupied with matters in the library, and forgot the tape, and the fact that the plate rested on the upper end of it. I was in a hurry when I came out. My time for dressing was very brief, indeed, and the tape swinging across my face added to my annoyance. I jerked it rather viciously. It came down. Also the plate that held it. The latter landed quite fairly on top of my head, and separated in a shower about me. My comment was heard by Adelia in the

kitchen, and put a sudden stop to the diversion in the bathroom. The Little Woman poked out her head to take account of the disaster.

"Don't overdo matters," she said, pleasantly. "We don't want to look fixed up for people. We want to seem just as we are all the time."

I suppose she thought that was humorous, but I found it impossible to seem amused. The plate had been a mended one, but it would never be mended again. I gathered up the fragments and hurled them with all my strength into the vacant lot adjoining. Then I came back and dressed with such dignity as the time limit would permit.

I was knotting my tie when I heard the wild whoop of announcement that "they" were com-

ing! I gave a pull and a twist, and my collar came unbuttoned. I repeated some of the comment on the plate disaster, and tugged and perspired and leaped into my coat, gave my hair a lick or two, and looked in to see what the Little Woman was doing.

I had expected to find her in a state of unfinished preparation and mental distress. Nothing of the sort. She was already dressed and down-stairs, pulling things into shape in the lower hall, which in my perturbation I had overlooked. I hurried to her assistance.

We emptied an ash-receiver, put some filled vases in position, carried a chair from the hall into the parlor and a chair from the parlor into the hall, wiped the furniture and the books and picture-frames, turned the reversible table-cover dust side down, grabbed dolls from

the corners, trundled a small carriage into the playroom, flung broom, duster, carpet-sweeper, dust-pan, hammer, and tacks into the kitchen, and as the bell went off swung wide the door to our guests, smiling a joyous welcome, with the assurance that we were so glad they had come at last, as the Precious Ones had grown impatient, waiting.

XV.

*The Passing of Adelia — and
Loula.*

WHEN once more the gloom of autumn gathered along the fields, when the pumpkin-vine lay blighted and blackened with the frost, — its golden store ripe for the gathering, — when the summer of our discontent had become as a closed link added to the chain of seasons, then also the gentle Adelia passed, and became a serene and simple annal of domestic history.

I find it difficult to speak of Adelia in a manner that will convey a fair impression of us all. She came to us in a time of sore

need, and she was with us through a period of many trials. That she was willing to remain with us through those weeks when all was hurly-burly—when lime-incrusted feet tramped back and forth over floors but lately swept, and when the kitchen range was filled with pots and pails of distressing mixtures—seems to me a fact worth recording with gratitude.

There were many good things about Adelia. She was a gentle, free-hearted soul, and her carefully-modulated speech, with its trace of the motherland, was all that could be desired. On the whole my feeling is that under the hard conditions of that season we did not live quite up to Adelia's level, and that we dragged her down.

It is true that she could not cook when she came to us, and she was

never able to construct a fire in the kitchen range, or to keep it over-night. These, however, were no great matters. I was willing to attend to the small matter of the fire, and both the Little Woman and myself rather enjoyed giving her lessons in cooking. She could boil water soon after she came to us, and almost immediately acquired the pleasant knack of coffee. She learned other things as the days passed, and while she never was what you might call a brilliant pupil, her willingness was in her favor, and she was fairly entitled to a diploma as "plain cook" when she graduated from our school.

As I was saying, I fear we demoralized Adelia. It was hard for even a very strong nature to survive that period when, as a friend expressed it, the top of the sugar-bowl was in the parlor and the

top of the parlor in the sugar-bowl. Adelia made an attempt at order and neatness when she came, but it was a hopeless undertaking. When it was given up, the tendency itself must have languished. Order was finally restored, and with the house fairly set in order we somehow thought it would stay so.

Not that we wished to be too clean. We had no desire to drive Happiness out the window with a broom, but it seemed to us that the small accumulation of dust and debris might be removed with so slight an effort, as compared with the former herculean tasks, that it would be mere play for Adelia to keep things "bright-shining as the sun."

I suppose that was just the trouble — it was too easy. After what we had endured, the daily accumulation seemed too little to

count. She was waiting for the customary inch or two of conglomerate to collect on the floor, for the gray windrows to gather along sills and sideboard.

In the gentlest manner possible we called her attention to these things. She aroused briefly and seemed willing to please; but lassitude was in her movement, and the sideboard and the glassware were marked with the curse of careless wiping. What Adelia needed was discipline, and this we could not give her. We are not strong on discipline at any time, and after that season of democratic household regulations and general sharing of discomfort, severity on our part was altogether out of the question. In a new place she would be a new broom, with a new mistress to set her in order. I think we all realized this. Then,

too, the summer was over, and winter in the country was not what she had desired.

We had grown fond of Adelia, and she had grown fond of us. The Precious Ones and the Tiny Small One loved her. They wept when she left us, and her own eyes were not dry. Some days later she returned briefly, with a distribution of gifts. Gentle Adelia! The dust has been removed many times since you left us, and every trace of our discontent has long since vanished. Our blessings and our good-will go with you. And, wherever you may be, may you find that unfaltering discipline and sustaining example, without which the best of service falters and the best of servants fail.

And now came Loula — Loula of the merry heart. She was a strong girl — full of youth and idiom, and sentimental songs. Her

youth and strength were commendable. Her songs were harmless enough, and pleased the Precious Ones, who, on the second day of her administration, were singing with rapture and what seemed unnecessary energy the rhythmic measures of "Come Back, Barney" and "Louisiana Lou."

Her idioms were more questionable. We endeavor to give the Precious Ones a fairly correct habit of speech, and our Adelia had been well-nigh free from the curiosities of the language as it is spoken between Fourth Avenue and the River of the East. Loula was a walking thesaurus of that terse and bracing vernacular of the East Side. Needless to say, the Precious Ones were "not slow in getting on to her curves." Within a week it would have been well-nigh impossible for them to speak of the

Tiny Small One as being fretful, when Loula repeatedly referred to her manner of protest as "chewing the rag."

It is true that Loula's forms of speech often had the advantage of brevity, which always means strength. Certain it is, they appealed to the ear of childhood. The Precious Ones "got a move on themselves," and before many days could "give points" to most of their associates. We recalled Adelia's cultured Hibernese, and wished that our Loula might be more like her in her modes of speech.

They had one thing in common. Neither of them could cook or attend to a fire when they came to us, and both received instruction. They mastered the art of cookery about equally well, but Adelia never learned to keep or cover a

fire, while Loula attained a fair knowledge of these matters about the end of the second month. Then she asked an increase of salary. When she got so she could turn off the dampers of the kitchen range, and, by leaving the top lid open a little, manage to hold fire overnight, she demanded more money or a diploma. We consulted, and decided to give her the diploma. And so another pupil graduated from our school and went forth to conquer.

Like Adelia, Loula had certain commendable qualities, most of which I have already mentioned. In addition, I may say that she generally approved of our methods, and declared that my chafing-dish oysters were the best she "ever et." The taste for my welsh-rare-bits was rather less easy to acquire, but this she also achieved in time,

and as Pussum is gratified by the appearance of the mouse-trap, so Loula was likely to become merry and musical at sight of the chafing-dish.

Yet, on the whole, it was better that she should go. The Precious Ones had learned most of her songs and enough idioms to keep us busy for a year. Her departure reduced our baker's bill by one-half, and there were other substantial benefits. We agreed to give up taking pupils for a week or two, and have a sort of vacation. We began it by picking our pumpkins.

We had already tried them, and they were good. In fact, there never had been anything so good as those pumpkin pies out of our own garden. We kept them ready for instant demand at any hour of the day. Being in the edge of the Great American Pie-belt, we were

under no restrictions, and with the courage of our appetites served them regardless of rules or social condemnation. Now we would gather the final harvest.

We went down into the faded garden. On either side of the little gateway the morning-glories were a black tangle — their seeds dropping, to prepare for another summer a new wealth of vine and blossom. The bean-bushes were mildewed and scattered, the corn was withered, the okra stalks, still stiff and upright, held a few dry rattling pods, the little house on the compost-pile had vanished and left not a trace behind. A single spot of green — the parsley-bed — seemed as a splendid emerald amid a tangle of decay.

Hand in hand we walked among the ruined beds, recalling the day we had planted this, the mornings

we had gathered that, the things we had learned for another year. How small the little place looked now that it was empty! It hardly seemed possible that it could have held all we planted and so many weeds besides. It seemed as if one might hoe over the entire bit of ground in a few minutes. Yet I had put in several hours of certain very hot mornings in cleaning up even a portion of that fertile spot. Now it was over. There were no more mosquitoes, no more busy ants, no more butterflies. In one corner a dead bee clung to a purple thistle bloom. The weeds were dead, too, all except the chickweed, which, like kind words, blossoms in every season and can never die.

We turned to look at our pumpkins. In all directions where the aggressive green tendrils had

found their way the uncovered store now lay revealed, ripe and sweetened for the harvest. Our catalogue has stated that pumpkins of this variety often weighed as much as two hundred pounds each. I don't think ours weighed that much. Either they did not, or I have become a tower of strength. Two by two I carried them into the cellar, and made of them a pyramid of gold.

Then it was nightfall. The sky was heavy and overcast — the dry stalks about us complained in the chill wind of evening. Quietly we passed up the little steps, through the gate of withered morning-glories. Summer with its thorn and blossom was ended.

We stir the embers in the fireplace and put on a fresh log. The bright blaze leaps up the chimney,

figures dance on the wall, the shadow of the easy chair reaches out on the firelit floor. We have paid well for that blaze and that shadow, but now, as the year closes in and night and storm gather without, we put cost and discomfort by. Other summers will bring us other gardens — and other griefs. Never mind them now. The past is the past — the future still undreamed. “Come sit by my side and let the world glide, for we shall ne’er be younger.”

XVI.

The Precious Ones.

WHETHER or not the Precious Ones deserve a chapter to themselves is a matter of question. Whether they deserve a good many of the things they get, frequently becomes a disputed point, and they usually get the benefit of the doubt. So it will be now. Those who object may skip this chapter.

The Precious Ones rise early. At least, they wake early, and between their beds occur long and seemingly unnecessary conversations, which the rest of the household would willingly forego. Frequently the interchange of

ideas becomes a discussion over some point which was not material in the beginning, and is lost almost immediately in the rapid-fire exchange of "I did!" "You didn't!" "It was!" "It wasn't!" "You can't!" "I can so!" which might continue indefinitely but for authoritative interference and the general uprising of the household.

The Precious Ones do not dress immediately. They are full of the joy of life and a desire for food, but they are willing to restrain the latter for the benefits of a rough and tumble pillow fight, which sometimes requires severity to quell. The Tiny Small One finds interest in these matters, and abets any sort of *mêlée* or bedlam with waving arms and expressions of delight. Completing her first round in the race of life, — being carried most of the way, but get-

ting ready to creep and totter the remaining distance, — she has become a Precious One on her own account. When she puts her fore feet on the edge of her pen and squeals, — that is, I mean, when she puts her chubby hands on the edge of her crib and gives vent to her approval, she arouses our own enthusiasm; when she topples back, with feet waving in the empyrean, we are moved to pet names and poetry.

There she lay, the Tiny Small One, with the sunrise on her tresses, with her feet stretched up to heaven — waving wildly to the zenith. And the elders, there beholding, saw the silken sheen of morning, saw the feet that waved so wildly, and in tenderness they named her — “Foot-in-Air” the elders called her — “Foot-in-Air” and sometimes “Silk-top.”

Breakfast never comes soon enough for the Precious Ones, once they are ready for it. I fear our discipline is a fugitive and erratic quantity. I know we surrender at such times when all the authorities we have ever tried to read counsel firmness. A piece of toast or a cracker is easier to produce than a convincing argument, and is more soothing in its effects. I suppose we shall all pay dearly for that toast and cracker some day, but on the whole it seems worth a good deal when breakfast won't be on the table for ten minutes, and the Precious Ones are in no condition to wait for even a tenth of that period.

Outdoor life appeals to the Precious Ones. Hardly is their breakfast down when they are ready to face whatever the day has brought in the way of weather.

Sun and storm, heat and cold, — all weathers look alike to them, and the matter of proper clothing is not well considered. They would go into zero weather bare-headed, bare-handed, perhaps even bare-footed, if we would let them. I have had my heart wrung by seeing meagrely clad children on the icy streets of the great city — little ones with tattered clothing and uncovered purple hands. I wonder if they really feel and mind these things as much as we think. I wonder, because I have seen the Precious Ones come in from stinging cold, their own little hands pinched and purple in spite of the nice warm mittens — in their pockets. I have known them to dash out, hatless, coatless, and mittenless, into weather that found its way through the warmest clothing I could carry. Verily it would

seem that the wind is tempered to childhood; or, it may be, that childhood is tempered to withstand the wind.

On very bad days, life in the playroom is hilarious and interesting. It is particularly so during and after the Christmas period, when new games and toys enliven the festivities and enhance the vigor of debate. Their forms of argument seem curious, and not always bearing on the point in hand. They are more than likely to become personal. In the matter of a Lotto score, for instance, it would be thought convincing for one to remark:

“You’ve got green hair!”

And the other:

“You’ve got plaid hair!”

“You eat grasshoppers!”

“You eat snakes!”

It is almost impossible to under-

stand what a matter of personal appearance, or diet, has to do with Lotto, or why snakes should be considered the final word. Certain it is that all hope for peaceful adjustment ceases at this point, and higher powers are obliged to step in to avoid carnage and mortality.

I suppose there are children who do not quarrel. I know there used to be — many of them. I met them in my Sunday-school books. They had a habit of dying in the last chapter. Perhaps that is why goodness has become scarce and unpopular in these later days. Remembering those stories I should grow uneasy if I saw the Precious Ones becoming saintly. Not that they are always belligerent, or even noisy. There are whole hours when they play in the fondest harmony, and when the sweetness of childhood is unal-

loyed. Perhaps there have been whole days of this sort. It seems doubtful, for I think I should have been frightened, and remembered the circumstance.

The Precious Ones are given to anniversaries. Christmas, Thanksgiving, Fourth of July, and all other calendar holidays, are a matter of course. Then there are all the birthdays, each of which is duly observed with feasting, friends, and ceremony. That Pussum's birthday must remain unknown to us is regarded as a misfortune, and there has been a movement toward getting the powers to set a day when proper observance might be made of an event so important to us all.

Then we have other days of rejoicing. The day of our removal to the country is one of these, and always during September we pack

a basket and go to a little field above the Harlem River, where in the old van-dwelling days we found a bit of rural green, and a breath of trees and flowers. This we call our "High-bridge Day," and the little man who near by sells ginger ale and peanuts and coffee welcomes us each year with a pleasant smile of remembrance, and waves us a fond adieu at parting. We shall have as many holidays by and by as they have in Italy, where the government has been obliged to take the matter in hand, with a view to securing at least one or two days in the week for the performance of labor.

The Precious Ones are democratic, and their choice of friends interests me. Our Elder Hope in particular is ultra-socialistic in her selections. I said to her one day:

"Who is that dingy little girl

that spent the afternoon with you? ”

“ Oh, why, that’s Bessie! Her mamma washes for Mrs. Briggs! ”

“ Um — nice little girl? ”

“ Just lovel-ly! ”

“ And that other little — eh, girl. That one out on the lawn this morning? ”

“ Why, that’s Hattie! Her papa is a dirt-digger! ”

“ Oh! — ah — certainly — any special kind of dirt? ”

“ No, just dirt. It comes up out of the street. Sometimes he finds things in it! ”

“ Dear me! How exciting! Nice little girl? ”

“ Um, yes! Nicer even than Bessie! ”

Of course there was nothing more to be said. I have always stood for democracy, myself, and have maintained that those who

toil at the tub, and those who go down into the dirt and dig, are the life and sinew of our system, and not to be despised.

Yet the Hope is not without aspiration. She has some thought of being a princess, with "proud" dresses and "blushy" hair, or a school-teacher — she isn't quite certain which. On the whole, she thinks she would prefer to "sell a candy-store" as a regular thing, and be a princess or a school-teacher for recreation. There was a time when she aspired to become a laundress, but she appears to have outlived this dream.

The candy-store ambition is shared by the Younger Joy, who is of modest tastes, and satisfied with anything that resembles chocolate. The Hope is of livelier imagination. Then, too, she has overdone the chocolate tendency, and cannot

now understand why any one should ever want to see chocolate again. This is likewise true of birthday cake with pink icing. The Joy never overdoes these matters. The effort to do so has been a failure. Chocolate, pink icing, lemonade, charlotte russe, and what not, separately or together, it matters little. Divided they may stand, but united they fall, and the destroyer of medleyed richness retires only to return again, uninjured, undismayed, and unappeased. I have known men that would give a million dollars for ten minutes of the Joy's digestion.

The Hope is inclined to look forward and to reflect. She informed me a few days ago that she had decided not to marry yet, because she might be sorry for it. "You see," she added, "I might find

somebody I'd rather have," which, on the whole, seemed a mature conclusion for her years. She added that she was afraid she might marry a burglar. She had read about a little girl whose father was a burglar, and, having decided that I was hardly fitted for this profession, her next danger seemed the chance of marrying one. The Joy cares nothing for such possibilities. Cake with raisins and a largess of chocolates cover the Joy's entire speculative field.

The Hope is devout. If she omits any feature of her prayers, she will begin them over. The Joy, more reckless in the matter of ritual, is willing to skip every other line of "Now I lay me" — so taking a short cut to grace.

I am likely to overdo this chapter. The subject to me seems in-

teresting, and there is a good deal I would like to say on the theme of child culture that isn't set down in any of the books we have tried to read. I have mentioned, I believe, that our discipline is uneven and not at all in accordance with the rules laid down by the heart-hungry, childless women who have time to think and write of such things. We have tried to be as they would have us, to govern with dignity and calm purpose, but we can't do it. Our discipline is erratic. Our punishment is likely to be summary, and in the nature of a surprise. After reading a chapter of the authorities, we have agreed between ourselves that as parents we are probably the poorest examples in the world — that a day's record of our home doings would blacken any book ever written on household government.

Yet somehow we love the Precious Ones, and, strange as it may seem, they profess to love us — not only in the hour of favor, but also in the moment of their direst disgrace and sorrow. Perhaps even this will count for something in the end.

I would not have it understood that we do not reason with the Hope and the Joy. We have wasted a good deal of energy in that way. That is, of course, it may not have been wasted, but reasoning with the Precious Ones always seems a good deal like saying your prayers; you never can tell when you are making an impression.

The hardest hour comes with the day's close. Then they are possessed with a mighty weariness of both flesh and spirit, and are correspondingly difficult. It is the

time designated by Mr. Longfellow as the Children's Hour, and far be it from me to gainsay him. It is theirs beyond a doubt, though there have been evenings when for a brief period it seemed to be the special province of one not often named in polite society. Of course, anything like punishment is worse than useless at such a time. As well trample flowers for bending before the wind. The clouds gather. The storm breaks. Life becomes strenuous and unreal. But five minutes later, when all are tucked up snug, as we pass from one couch to another and look down into rosy, sleeping faces, it is as if we could hear the whisper of angels' wings.

XVII.

The Things I Have Not Told.

THIS is not a story with a purpose. If it had a purpose in the beginning, I have forgotten what it was, and if any reader has come this far, he will probably agree with me that both of us have had enough to bear without the burden of teaching or being taught with carefully turned phrases and theories finely spun.

On the whole, it has been a sort of general unburdening, — a kind of experience-meeting, — and I suspect that more than one reader, if I am so fortunate as to have more than that, may be reminded of troubles of his own, per-

haps even moved to speak of them, with no other purpose than that relief of spirit which is said to follow confession.

There are a good many things which I have not told. There are experiences which, with the aid of a hypnotist, I have been able to forget. Others I have omitted for the reason that the comic papers, so-called, have told and retold and overtold them until they have lost all point and flavor, and appeal now only to a few benighted flat-dwellers who lack the desire or the courage to become "commuters," as we are termed, and to the resident of Todd's Switch, who wouldn't know a real commuter if he saw one fully panoplied and lowering the record in a race with the 8.15 train.

Nobody else reads comic papers any more. The intelligent city man

has little time for their gaudy plates and their threadbare humor, while we of the suburbs do not need to brighten our days with artificial means. We have more real fresh genuine humor in one day than would be conceived in a lifetime by the rusty, dusty scribbler of "comics," who never gets nearer to the country itself than the ferry landing, and whose chief idea of suburban life is a picture of a wild creature with a bag in one hand and a piece of pie in the other leaping fences and ditches to overtake a train that is some miles away in the red, white, and blue landscape.

Let us protest against this picture. I have never eaten pie while running for a train. If I ever should, I would not attempt to jump ditches and fences unless it was very firm pie, such as grows

in Harlem, and not the mellow pumpkin or the mellifluous mince and custard of rural life. I have hurried to catch trains, of course. Breathes there a man who hasn't? I once fell down, and my hat rolled under the train. But then I simply waited until the last car passed, picked it up — the hat — and climbed on the rear platform — of the car. There was no disgrace in that — nothing to call for a lurid picture in mittens, muffler, and arctic overshoes, as we have been only too often depicted by the artist who is professionally funny. I have never worn mittens and muffler and arctic overshoes when I needed to catch a train. I should have missed my train if I had.

There is another comic-paper idea which I feel has been overdone. I refer to the home-coming with innumerable boxes and bun-

dles and fruit-trees and clothes-horses, attached and piled as long as they will hang on. I have never brought home a clothes-horse, nor as many bundles as the artist puts into his pictures. I couldn't do it. I have tried repeatedly, and I know the pictures are exaggerated. To be sure, I have had some curious assortments, and I may say that it is no "cinch" to get home with a lawn-mower, six window-screens, and a pound of coffee, even when the coffee is in a little gunny-sack and the screens are supposed to be securely tied together.

Of course they were not securely tied. They slipped and wobbled a good deal, while the little bag of coffee had a way of sliding from the place I put it, just as I had carefully arranged matters and was getting ready to move on again. I had thought the firmly

sewed little gunny-sack a good idea, but it wasn't. Had it been a paper sack I should have distributed the coffee in various pockets, and it couldn't then have slipped from under my arm or my chin at inopportune moments.

After all, the problem was easy enough. I merely put the mower down on the ground where it belonged, tied the screens on top of it, and laid the coffee on the screens. Then quite comfortably I mowed my way home, while neighbors came out to observe and commend my ingenuity.

Speaking of mowing, that is another comic-paper idea. The commuter at home is supposed to be *always* mowing. In summer he is thought to begin the day with a buzzing dewy round, and to follow the whizzing wheel of toil into the far dimness of evening. Let us

object to this! Let us declare that we do not always mow! Why, I have let my lawn go without mowing for ten days at a time, and then traded a man two suits of clothes and a pair of shoes to operate on it with a scythe. I have given up mowing my terrace altogether. I gave it up one hot day when the mower veered off to one side, and dragged me down. In the instant when my nose was parting the grass, and the events of my past life were as a panorama before me, I resolved never to mow that terrace again. A vow made at such a time is sacred.

There are other things that I have not dwelt upon in these chapters. I might have told of the Italian umbrella mender and razor grinder, who caught us in a moment of weakness and mended the Little Woman's umbrella,

ground her scissors, and my axe and razor. I hope he will call again some day. The razor and scissors are ready for him. Also the axe. They are no longer sharp, but they will serve my purpose. I shall ask him to be seated, and I will shave him with the razor, and I will cut his hair with the scissors. Then, if he still survives, I shall use the axe.

I also contemplated doing a chapter on a trained nurse I had. I need not go into the particulars of my ailment. Suffice it to say, it was something that great men often die of, and I was scared. I know now what a trained nurse means. It is a nurse trained to sleep under any circumstances. I have never seen one so well trained as mine. She was slightly deaf, and snored, while I watched the clock and threw my shoes at her

when it was medicine-time. She enjoyed her visit with us. She liked the Little Woman's cooking, and when the Little Woman fell ill she liked mine, and stayed on. She said my chocolate was something unusual, and she had such passion for my breakfast-food that once, in a moment of preoccupation, I addressed her as Mrs. Pettijohn.

I meant to have made something out of a shopping expedition of the Little Woman's — a sort of bargain-counter disaster that occurred when she wandered off one day alone. Not that the Little Woman hasn't good taste, but we all have these moments of aberration and economy. She came home with some flower vases that I have never been able to find since. When a week later she suggested that I needed a smoking-table, and I

said, "Don't *you* buy it, honey," she left the room.

Yet she had her revenge. We needed a butter-dish, and I said I would bring it home next day. I didn't like the assortment I met. They seemed too big. Then just as I was leaving I discovered a number of smaller ones on a side-table, and asked the clerk why she hadn't shown me these before. She was silent — in contrition, I thought — while I looked at them and expressed approval. They were not round, like the others, nor so large. Neither were they so deep, though they had the same little movable bottoms, and seemed in every way desirable. Arriving home, I exhibited my purchase with enthusiasm.

"Isn't it pretty?" I said. "Don't you think it a jolly butter-dish?"

A peculiar smile grew about the Little Woman's mouth.

"Why, yes, I suppose it would do for butter," she said, "but don't you think it would be better for soap?"

I find that I have overlooked our colored friends, the "wash-ladies," who begin so well that we grow exuberant in each new discovery. They start in by arriving promptly at seven, thankful to begin the day of labor with a word of greeting and a cup of coffee. At the end of the second week they arrive at eight, to discuss their family affairs over a hot breakfast. At the end of the fourth week they drop in at nine, and expect mince pie, served with cheese on the side. Then, having reached our limit of luxury, and having induced us to give away a number of things we shall need ever after,

they disappear and send one of their relations.

Also there was the colored man, who dug a ditch for me and afterward borrowed two dollars. He assured me that if I were to send for him at midnight he would come and work it out. I suppose I made a mistake in not sending for him at that time. When one morning I did send, he failed to appear, but returned word that his mother-in-law was dead. Two weeks later I sent for him again. That killed his sister-in-law. I gave up after that. I feared I should destroy all his wife's people.

These are among the chapters I did not write. Most of them are by the way, and not necessarily a part of that suburban life which we of the fields find sweet, in spite of the overdrawn caricature, and

the murmur of the musical mosquito. The caricature we scorn, and it has been lately discovered that only one brand of the mosquito bites. Also, that even this variety does not exist entirely upon human beings. We have been led to believe that all were biters, and that humanity was their one article of diet. The mosquitoes themselves, so far as we have interviewed, have never denied this. Now that a court of inquiry has investigated and silenced the traducers, it would seem that the final sting is to be removed from suburban life and the pursuit of rural happiness.

XVIII.

As to Happiness.

TO those contemplating rural life I may say that living in the country is not a perennial round of bliss. Neither is it necessarily a life of drudgery, undertaken for the sake of economy and the children. Happiness anywhere is a good deal a matter of temperament — a willingness to make the best of things as we find them, with a view to making them better by and by. Unless we are inclined to do this, the Hunt for Happiness will presently develop into a Lost Cause, and there are a good many people who appear to be engaged in just this sort of a quest. They

do not hunt for happiness. They hunt for shortcomings, and they always find them. They always *will* find them, anywhere this side the soundless gates. When I meet a man whose only opinion of a locality or condition is a catalogue of drawbacks, I know immediately that heaven is his home. Whether he ever reaches it or not is another matter. Perhaps he wouldn't be pleased with it, after all. It would seem as well to anticipate some of the joys of a future state in the climate of which we have been led to believe there is at least an element of uncertainty. Don't expect to find a perfect spot in this old worn-out world. Don't look for the flower of happiness on the dark side of life. It doesn't grow there. Be an optimist.

Having now become an optimist, select your habitation. Pick

it out on a sunny day, for your first impression will linger and become a memory worth while. As to locality, almost anywhere within fifteen miles of the city (I am speaking of New York), with good train service, is as near in point of time as the up-town trolley distances, and far more comfortable in point of travel. I have held to a strap, with my feet freezing on a wet floor, and been bumped and banged about for a hundred blocks or more, night in and night out, for months at a time, — delayed by teams, breakdowns, and blockades, — to find at the other end a scant supply of steam going, and no place to get really warm. I tried to make the best of these things then, and I did; but they are over now, and I can damn them, and I do.

Suburban trains are rarely over-

filled, and night and morning there are expresses that bowl along through pleasant fields. These trains are well warmed, luxurious, and swift of travel. Ten miles out, and within reasonable distance from your station, means an hour from your door to your office; and it is always the same, for there are no heavy coal-trucks on the track ahead, with a driver who doesn't heed the fact that there are a string of "trolleys" behind him, or care that you have an engagement with a man at nine o'clock, or a dinner at 6.30. No blockades — no currents to be shut off. Suburban trains run on time, as you will discover if you try to take one and count on as much as ten seconds of latitude. You may get the train. It will depend on whether you can make up ten seconds in the distance you have to cover.

The suburban resident reaches his office at nine, and his home at 6.30, if these are his hours. If he does not do so it is because he misses his train, and those who are expecting him know that there is another twenty minutes or half-hour to wait, and won't be nervously watching every car that jars and jangles by — waiting as much as two hours until the blockade opens.

Having now settled the transportation question, we will speak of location. Pick high ground. That sounds like unnecessary advice, but I've seen so many who didn't that I think maybe they forgot just those three words. Perhaps they remembered and didn't care. Perhaps they like mosquitoes, and malaria, and water in their cellars. If they do, then low ground is a good selection. To

my mind, the high hilltop isn't the best, either. The winter blast is sometimes abroad in its strength, and the hilltop suffers. Half or two-thirds the way up seems more desirable, facing the sunrise or the south, and not more than ten minutes' walking distance from the station, or five minutes dead run. Either exercise is beneficial, provided you don't have heavy baggage or try to finish your breakfast as you fly, in accordance with the comic-paper idea.

Get two lots if you can, — one for the house, one for the children, — and in either case leave room for a garden. Don't be without your garden — even if it be only five feet square, and have nothing in it but a few radishes, lettuce, and beans, with a bunch or two of old-fashioned flowers. You can get more joy out of a little dab of

ground like that — more exercise, self-esteem, and real home feeling than you can get out of an acre that you don't have time to bother with, and have to let your weeds and things go unharvested or be turned over to some soulless workman to attend.

As to the house itself, if you buy one that is already built, look it over as carefully as you can, from garret to cellar. Then, without knowing anything in particular about houses, trust something to your general impression. There is a sort of subconsciousness in all of us that sees more than the conscious eye, and rarely leads us far wrong, if we trust it. Nevertheless, it is a good plan to see if the chimneys draw. The subconsciousness might forget to look up the chimneys, and it is a good deal easier to light a newspaper or two and

see that the smoke goes where it belongs, than to pay four dollars and eighty cents a day to a mason to litter up your house with reconstruction. Also try the plumbing, and see that the water-pipes are not on the northwest corner of the house, with no packing between the floors. That is a cold corner, and some January morning you are likely to have water everywhere except the places you need it most. These are simple things, — easy to look after, — hard to remedy if wrong.

Don't fail to have an open fire, either coal or wood, the latter for choice. A country home is not complete without a blazing hearth. Even when you do not use it, the knowledge that it is there is comforting, while on dull days and chill mornings it becomes the heart and happiness of the house-

hold. Many a man goes to his club or to more questionable comfort because there is no firelit corner at home. There may be other reasons, but just now we speak of the open fire. Nor is it expensive. As ventilation it saves doctor bills. Also as a vitalizer, for its direct radiation ranks next to the sun itself. Doctor Cook, the Antarctic explorer, found that during the long polar night he could restore action and vigor to his debilitated crew by placing them stripped before blazing coals and baking them — first on one side, then on the other — like turkeys. Being baked that way would seem likely to make a man active and vigorous, at least for a few minutes, and, as I say, such a fire is not especially expensive, considering the number of men you could bake with a cord of wood or a ton of coal. Suppose

a cord of wood does cost about six dollars, and lasts only about two months! Is there any more pleasure and benefit to be had out of any other six dollars? Why, gentle reader, you know very well that you and I have each spent more than that in one evening, and had nothing to show for it next morning but a headache that we would have been willing to trade for one piece of kindling.

Perhaps you will prefer to buy a home without a fireplace, and have the fun of building one, as we did. If you have ideas, forbearance, and money, you can get rid of them in that way. If you have persistence, you may get something near what you want. But stop all other work while matters are in progress, and watch every brick that goes into your chimney.

You may prefer to build your entire house, but in the face of this proposition I gasp, and words refuse to come. I can imagine the general possibility of building a house. But I can also imagine that there might be a good many things the matter with it when completed. Then it would be on my ground, and there would be no easy way of getting it off. Rather would I take my pick from houses that the other man has built. His be it to combat and coerce the carpenter, the mason, and the plumber. Mine to consider and compromise on the result.

While I am on this subject, I should like to speak of the mechanics. I should like to speak *to* the mechanics. I should like to ask them why they consider that the man who has earned enough to pay them four or five dollars a day

for their labor is without taste or knowledge as to what he wants; why they are unwilling to give it to him; why they regard the man who pays as a sort of necessary imbecile nuisance; why they are more willing to deceive and damage and destroy than they are to make a kindly and honest effort to please him — to really give him a fair exchange for the money they receive? I should like to ask most of them, as honest men, why they do not learn their trades with some thoroughness and practise them with some care before they enter a union in order to obtain the wages of skilled workmen? I am not opposed to union on principle. Far from it; but I believe there is more harm done to the great cause of labor, to honest, faithful, and capable workmen, as well as to the prosperity of a great nation, by

unions, as they are to-day, than could be wrought by any blight or disease or drought or seismic upheaval that the mind of man could conceive or the forces of nature bring to culmination. There are men belonging to unions and receiving (not earning) four dollars a day, who cannot saw a board straight, who cannot take a measure correctly, who cannot cut a piece of lumber to fit a particular place without wasting more material than it takes to fill the opening. I have known of a carpenter who cut a hole in a floor for a new chimney, which was afterward located at the other end of the room. He replaced the pieces in the first hole, but instead of putting them back as they came out, he turned them end for end, which would not have mattered so much, only that the room had a painted

green border. Reversing this border made a curious green spot in the floor, and a peculiar-looking break in the border. Such men as this one are the very life of the unions, and the death of worthy achievement. Outside of the unions they would not earn a dollar a day. The really skilled workmen, who are in the minority, they force into the unions against their will. I have talked with a good man here and there, and I know what they have told me. To the bungler and the agitator and the walking delegate, large benefits accrue. To the progressive mechanic, and to the public who pays, the union of to-day is a blight and a curse! Understand, I do not speak from the standpoint of the man of means, born to the purple and without understanding of a workman's life. I toil, and I have

always toiled. I have handled a saw and a paint-brush for pay. I did not handle them very well, but better than many of those who are in the unions to-day. My sympathies are all with labor, as a class, but not with all laborers as individuals. Of every honest, well-meaning workman I would be the bosom friend. I will share his lunch. I will drink beer out of his pail. I will borrow money of him, if he will let me have it. But if he gives me bad plumbing, or a leaky roof, or drops a brick in my chimney, he is the people's enemy, and I will destroy him. Some night in a dark alley I will lie in wait for him. I will have the brick, or the gas-pipe, or a section of scantling ready. I will secure his attention with them as he passes, and I will render a public service.

I have also a word or two for the builder — the man who undertakes your job. I am not one of those, at least, not now, who believes that one ought to be able to make a few marks on a piece of paper and call in a builder with the expectation that he will catch the idea and put up a satisfactory house. The builder who can do that is dead. Indeed, I doubt if he ever really lived, except in tradition. Any builder, however good, must have plans, carefully conceived and conscientiously executed. The man who starts out to build with nothing but two photographs and some pencilings of his own, must fall by the wayside. He may get something better than he conceived, but the risk seems extra hazardous. It is next to impossible to get things even with the best-

laid and most elaborate plans. It is of this I would speak now.

We might reasonably suppose that we could give an architect's plans to skilled workmen, — I mean workmen who draw skilled wages, — and go away on a vacation, to find the house complete and well constructed upon our return. If I were a rich man I would build such a house — as an experiment. I would go to my architect and say, "Draw me a plan for a house to cost five thousand dollars, complete." Then I would take the plan to a builder, and I would say to him, "Get skilled workmen, and build me this house. I am going away, and I wish it to be ready on my return." Then I would take a vacation for any length of time he might specify, and I would overstay for good measure. Yet upon my re-

turn the foundation would be still unlaied, though his excuses would be like unto a walled city. I should grow old in vacations while that house was being built. And when at last it was finished, and paid for, — when I had settled with my other creditors, and was starting for the almshouse, — I would present it to mine enemy.

Perhaps you will say there should have been a contract as to price and period. Perhaps you are right; yet I have known men who have gone straight from contract-houses to the house of lunacy. I prefer old age and the county farm.

Small contracts, you will say. Build largely and you will find it different. But suppose I cannot build largely? Suppose I only want a bungalow of two rooms? If I pay union wages, am I not at

least entitled to honest effort and a kind word now and then, from the man who is putting in my foundation, and getting most of it wrong? And as for big jobs, how about those great buildings that collapse here and there when half-finished, because they are too flimsily built to hold together until their shells of walls are braced and stayed and roofed, and so turned over to the owner as being well and properly constructed? How about those great buildings just off Fifth Avenue that were condemned last year before they were finished, because they tipped and leaned and sagged and threatened a million lives? Those were big enough jobs. Big jobs to put up, — big jobs to take down, and the contractors and builders and workmen were well and properly paid. I have just made two mottoes, or,

rather, I should say, a motto and a commandment. "Eternal vigilance is the price of a good job." That is the motto; and the commandment, "If your contractor deceives you, slay him. There is no other recourse."

XIX.

As to Further Happiness.

HAVING now got our house bought or built, and the workmen properly condemned and executed, we will take a brief look at its contents. Have plenty of bric-à-brac shelves over your doors, and extending along the walls. Bits of china and the like collect as the years pass, and you want a safe and decorative place to keep them. Walls should be plain — the plainer the better, and there is nothing so restful to the eyes or so good for pictures as the soft, green, heavy cartridge-paper, with several shades lighter for the ceilings. Some forms of

striped paper will be comparatively harmless, and even spotted paper, where the spots are sufficiently invisible, may be endured.

Yet it is dangerous to experiment with these deadly things. The result is so uncertain. I knew a woman who more than ten years ago contracted a case of Spotted Paper in its most violent form. She is almost entirely over it now, but it has left its mark and shadow on her life. Often, too, it seems beautiful in the beginning, like the hectic flush, that has sorrow somewhere behind. I beg of you, beware of the fatal fascination of spotted paper.

What is said of walls applies as well to floor coverings. They should be quiet and soft in tone. Rugs are in great favor, and must eventually take the place of all cut-and-sewed carpetings. I am

not altogether in sympathy, however, with the advertiser who announces "Fur Animal Rugs," and declares that "these are the rugs that give character to the home. A tiger glaring before the grate in the library," he says, "a fox in the dining-room, and a wildcat in the hall add a touch of savage elegance that nothing else can give."

He is doubtless right about the "savage elegance," but that isn't just the sort of atmosphere I seek. A Bengal tiger isn't the kind of "character" I want to find in my library, and I do not especially hunger for a fox in my dining-room. Neither do I wish to meet a wildcat in my hall — particularly if I am returning at a late hour, after dining with friends. I have been nearly frightened into spasms by a tame cat — poor old Pussum, who had been left up-stairs

by mistake, and had sat up for me. He rubbed against my leg in the dark, and if he hadn't purred just then I should have screamed for help. He frightened the Little Woman, too, on another night when I was out and he wasn't, but that is by the way. No, I do not care for a menagerie, even a dead one. I prefer the more quiet things — the fabrics of the East.

The Orientals weave and mingle their colors harmoniously, but even the Orientals in these days are influenced by the taste and commerce and greed of the West, and their more gaudy patterns may be safely avoided. A rug should not be too pronounced in its design and color scheme. It is not necessary in order to be beautiful that its pattern should suggest an assortment of corsets, or even of Christmas-trees. Let it mix and mingle and make

the heart glad with hues and hints as of spilled wine and the faded bloom and glow of forgotten summers.

Draperies may be a bit brighter, but age and toning down will help the India print, or the Bagdad and Kelim stripe, however beautiful they may seem in the beginning. And draperies are always useful. A piece of old fish-net swings gracefully in an arch, and a single curtain breaks the length of a narrow hall.

Buy furniture carefully. It will accumulate with years, and you want your accumulation to be satisfactory. Furniture is a sort of statement of fact, and should be simple and unvarnished. I do not mean that it should be clumsy and crude, or even unpolished. I mean only that it should be lacking in lacquer, and chary of ornamenta-

tion. Again, as a statement of fact, it should not deteriorate with age, but become time-honored and revered as the years pass. The furniture of our grandfathers is sought for to-day, because it is substantial, — because it was polished and not lacquered, — because it was truth throughout and not a flimsy mockery.

I do not assume to speak as one with authority in the matter of individual selection, but I should shun guilt. A gold chair or a gold-leaf cabinet may look well in certain places, but I cannot at this moment think where the place would be outside of a show-window, unless, possibly, in a “wild-cat” hall. Neither can I conceive of anything more disheartening than to awake some morning with a fit of indigestion, and be compelled to sit in a gold chair and con-

template bulgy gold panels where Watteau lay figures in fancy-dress costumes carry on weak flirtations that have no beginning, no end, and lead only to mania and suicide. Don't have guilt! Don't have things with weak, wobbly legs! Don't buy because it's cheap! Wait till you can pay for the better thing. Have substance! Have Truth! Have Happiness!

L'Envoi.

BUT, lo, while I am writing
it is Christmas Eve. Outside
the skies are dull and low,
and there is a stillness and a mys-
tery on the fields — the stillness
and the mystery that have come
down through the ages from that
first Christmas Eve, when shep-
herds and their flocks grew silent
in the mystic hush that gathered on
the plains of Bethlehem.

Within and without the air is
filled with the whisper of expecta-
tion, and children tiptoe from
room to room, half-fearful, half-
hopeful of getting a glimpse of the
wonderful old giver who must be
very near now — the merry saint

of sleigh and reindeer and all the marvel of toys and bonbons and cookies, so much finer and more wonderful than any that we humble mortals can ever bake or buy.

And now the younger ones eagerly hasten to bed that the long winter night may pass. Eagerly to bed to hear a story that after nineteen hundred years few can repeat without moist eyes and faltering voice. Then for awhile Santa Claus waits on the Sand Man, and hardly have lids fallen when there are heard the signals of the good saint's coming — the gallop of his reindeer and the faint, far echo of his bells.

Morning — and a happy old-fashioned Christmas. In the play-room a tree, and through the open door the glow of the new fireplace with its bright logs and crackling flames. Everybody has been re-

membered. Even Pussum and family have a tree, a little one, upon which there are some bits of delicious steak and certain packets of very desirable catnip. The Precious Ones are filling themselves with happiness. Within two days, at the present rate, everything will be eaten up but the tree. As for the Tiny Small One, she is making her presents felt by hammering them vigorously against everything within reach.

On the little garden without, the snow lies white, and beyond the hill, where nobody lives, and where nobody is there to see, frost-elfins are sporting amid the grass. That is, of course, if there is any snow, any grass, and any hill when nobody is there to see them. I doubt these seeming realities sometimes, and just now The Hope said to me:

“ Oh, papa, suppose this is all a dream! Suppose everything is a dream! Suppose there is no Christmas! no tree! That we only dream it all! ”

Who knows! I have thought of that, too. But if it be a dream, let us dream happily, — let us dream forgivingly, even of those who have betrayed and spitefully used us. For be it of sleep or waking, — of dreamland or reality, — it is the time of peace on earth, and to all mankind good-will.



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